

MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG AND HER BOOK



Gender and the Making of
Textual Authority

Sara S. Poor

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and Her Book*

Gender and the Making of
Textual Authority

Sara S. Poor

PENN

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To Ann Marie Rasmussen

When at last it will be possible for every human being to set his pride beyond sexual differentiation, in the difficult glory of free existence, then only will woman be able to let her history, her problems, her doubts, her hopes merge with those of humanity; then only will she, in her life and her works, be able to reveal the whole of reality and not merely her own person. As long as she still has to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

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Preface

Since the 1970s, there have been repeated calls for the revision of literary canons to include female authors. Feminist criticism has faulted literary histories for systematically excluding the contributions of women; but the contributions of medieval women writers have been especially vulnerable to exclusion because many appeared simply to have been forgotten, lost in the transition from manuscript to printed book, or allowed to pass from memory in the drive to embrace a new and redefined modern age. Mechthild of Magdeburg (ca. 1210–1282), author of an extraordinary set of mystical revelations called *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (The Flowing Light of the Godhead), is now counted among a significant number of medieval women writers to have been recovered or reclaimed for the literary histories of the Middle Ages.¹

This group includes, but is not limited to, other figures from Germany (Hildegard of Bingen, Elisabeth of Schönau, Gertrud of Helfta, and Mechthild of Hackeborn), Italy (Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena), France (Marguerite Porete, Christine de Pizan), Spain (Teresa of Avila), Sweden (Birgitta of Sweden), the Low Countries (Beatrice of Nazareth and Hadewijch), and England (Marie de France, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe). The presence of this illustrious group in numerous studies and anthologies of medieval literature now attests to their renewed status as important writers from a number of different perspectives (theological, literary, linguistic, historical, and cultural).² Yet even such figures as Elisabeth of Schönau and Christine de Pizan, who were widely read in their own day, had to be rediscovered by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars. The aim of this book is to interrogate the apparent fall of medieval women authors from and their return to our collective literary and historical consciousness.

My interest in this historical problem grows out of a desire to address a persistent and troubling dilemma for scholars of literature by women in literary studies departments: How does one advance the place and legitimacy of women authors in academic canons while also avoiding the pitfalls of essentializing and thus marginalizing them as women? This dilemma has its origins in late twentieth-century French feminism, with its focus on the subversive potentials of women's writing.³ Soon after these works began to be read and translated outside of France, Anglo-American feminists began to focus their attention on “lost” or ignored women writers of all eras.⁴ Attending

these efforts were critiques of literary traditions that had overlooked or ignored all but a few women writers.⁵ Works such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, first published in 1977, countered this bias with pioneering attempts to revise the canon. For Showalter, attention to the "landscape" of English women writers between the "peaks" of the greats (Austen, the Brontës, Eliot) led her to declare the existence of an active and separate female subculture, indeed a tradition of women for women.⁶ Although initially focused primarily on modern and English fields, the feminist project of recovery that grew out of this work and others has since become one of the major tasks of feminist literary studies.⁷ Indeed, its legacy in the field of German Studies on both sides of the Atlantic suggests that the task is far from completed.⁸ Much work has been done to remedy this situation, although some have argued that contributions to this project have been less successful in Germany than in the United States.⁹

Despite this ongoing work on recovering women writers to medieval and national literary canons, few of the women authors mentioned here enjoy the kind of literary authority accorded to traditional canonical authors like the French "father" of Arthurian romance, Chrétien de Troyes, or the German medieval "best-seller" Wolfram of Eschenbach, or even other religious authors like Meister Eckhart. While the boundaries of literary canons have perhaps been extended, authority or the weight of canonicity has yet to come to the newly included authors.¹⁰ This lag can in my view be traced to persisting problems related to the strategies of canon reform. Because they are organized around the category of "women," the anthologies through which we have gained ready access to the writings of medieval women inadvertently promote the idea that women like Hildegard of Bingen, a twelfth-century abbess who received her visions from God in Latin and whose resulting authority made her bold enough to criticize the Emperor, and Angela of Foligno, a thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary who had been married and whose often violent ecstatic experiences were recorded for her by a Franciscan friar are universally the same. An anthology of male philosophers that stretches across time periods and linguistic or cultural boundaries creates a tradition of philosophy as an intellectual discipline or a line of thought; however, an anthology of writers who have little else in common except their gender tends to construct a tradition that invites its readers to reduce the complexities of those writings to unified female experience, which is then devalued. Although we must acknowledge the partial success of canon reform efforts using the category of women—certainly more women writers and women's history is being studied than ever before—we must also acknowledge that the use of this category continues to result in a stigmatization of women as deviant and therefore secondary to the (male) universal.

By universal I mean, for example, the valence of the conventional category of literature in which male authors are seen to represent a human (or

national) point of view or cultural moment, not a specifically male one. The universal is traditionally masculine in that the authority to represent or speak for all has consistently been a male prerogative. The continued marginalization of female authors in different academic canons today is symptomatic of a situation described already in the 1950s and 1960s by Simone de Beauvoir (paraphrased here by Toril Moi): “As long as women are denied access to the universal, sexual difference is used against them.”¹¹ Categories such as “women’s mysticism” or “medieval women writers” tend to foster essentialist generalizations (for example, “all women writers/mystics, regardless of their historical situations, write/act in such-and-such a manner”) as well as particularization and devaluing (for example, “this is *merely* a group of women and therefore offers no insights into humanity, it is not central or crucial or weighty—it is not authoritative”). The dilemma we continue to face is thus as follows: The continued marginalization of women as an essentialized, ahistorical category means that the project of recovery is only effective to a certain point; but this same continued marginalization also means that the project of recovery is difficult to abandon.

For this reason, this study focuses on the reception of one author and her writings, Mechthild of Magdeburg and *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, rather than on a group of women authors. Instead of taking a horizontal view of a number of women authors from a broadly defined medieval period and thereby possibly succumbing to the pressure to generalize about a female literary tradition of some kind, I adopt a vertical view, looking at one author and the authority granted her name and book from the Middle Ages to the late twentieth century. Tracing the fate of Mechthild’s book escapes the current dilemma facing the project of recovery (the impossible choice between continued absence if we abandon the project and continued marginalization if we embrace it) by detailing Mechthild’s presence (not absence) in canons of the past that were central to German history and culture: for example, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century vernacular mysticism, fifteenth-century monastic reform, and nineteenth-century German literature. This study argues that, although gender was often a significant factor in the construction of textual authority, it was never the sole reason for exclusion from literary canons, however constructed. Indeed, as the following chapters will demonstrate, Mechthild’s *The Flowing Light* has functioned in not one but many differently conceived traditions for different ideological reasons. Further, the reception history of the manuscripts transmitting Mechthild’s writings shows us a vibrant literary culture in which women figured centrally as producers of religious books. Finally, the differing meanings and functions of authorship elucidated by this study deepen and clarify current feminist and theoretical discussions of authorship and canon precisely by historicizing the concepts. In this way, the project acts as an illustration of what has been done for some male canonical authors and what is urgently necessary for less canonical writers, male or female.¹² By examining closely how and why a

female-authored text is or has been included in traditions over time, we not only find the material presence of women in various traditions (beguines, religious orders, mysticism, philosophy, German literature, medieval books, and so on) but also are made more consciously aware of the categories we continue to use in our work to define or imagine those traditions (holiness, literariness, nation, gender). Indeed, by considering precisely what sort of authorship was important, how it was contested, and for what reasons at different times, this book enjoins us as modern scholars to clarify what we mean when we argue for the authority (or canonicity) of any author—male or female—and what precisely is at stake in doing so.

This imperative strikes me as particularly urgent in the field of German Studies in the United States where, as Elke Frederiksen remarks, the classical canon of German literature—in which the literature of the *Goethezeit* is still defining and central—persists in today's university departments largely unchanged.¹³ The classical German canon referred to in most of the discussions in the United States is one that begins in 1750. This division is increasingly reflected institutionally, as one German department after another fails to hire medievalists or early modernists when others retire.¹⁴ As Hinrich Seeba notes, this canon became institutionalized in American German departments by way of German refugees from National Socialist Germany who “tried to hold on to the literary triumphs of ‘the German classics’ as proof of the ‘better’ Germany that could not be destroyed—not even in Auschwitz.”¹⁵ Changes that have occurred in the United States since the 1980s are related to the engagement with a variety of theoretical approaches (Frankfurt school Marxist literary criticism and ideology critique, deconstruction, cultural studies, gender studies, and most recently, minority/post-colonial studies). In Germany, these new approaches have simply been applied to canonical texts; in the United States, they have become a canon unto themselves.¹⁶ But the shift to German Studies as cultural studies, which, it was hoped, would open up the study of German history, literature, and culture to more students, as well as open up the canon, has resulted in a de facto decanonization of anything considered to be premodern (that is, before 1750). Although I do not share Jeffrey Sammons's despair that students in American German departments are studying other things besides Goethe and Lessing, I think he is right when he observes that the field of German Studies is being restricted increasingly to the twentieth century (Weimar, Holocaust, critical theory, Wall, post-Wall).¹⁷ We are thus faced with either a persistent classical literary canon that continues to include women authors only marginally if at all or a new canon of theory and cultural studies that leaves us devoid of a past.¹⁸ Insofar as this is true, the fate of the two main conceptual categories in this book (women and the past) are inextricably linked: Like women writers, the past is now being relegated to a secondary position vis à vis a universal present.

This book was conceived in large part as a response to this trend. The

history of Mechthild's book not only teaches us much about particular aspects of the Middle Ages in Central Europe but also it demonstrates in numerous ways how vital the study of the medieval period can be for contemporary literary, theoretical, and historical concerns. The study of the changing degrees of authority accorded Mechthild's book and her name provides us with more precise histories of authorship, gender, canon, and tradition. It sheds light on the complex literary culture surrounding religion and books at the dawn of the age of printing. The dialogic culture of mysticism to which the medieval manuscripts bear witness opens a window onto premodern modes of a postmodern intertextuality at work. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception of mysticism complicates our narratives of the construction of German national identity. The contemplative reading required of medieval devotional anthologies alerts us to both differences and continuities in the reading practices of our age—what is Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, for example, if not an anthology meant to stimulate contemplation? Of course, drawing such a connection also forces us to differentiate between the type of critical thinking Adorno was after and that espoused by religious mystical handbooks. The result, though, is a more precise (and historical) understanding of the concepts at hand. The result is a better understanding of both critical theory and the role of the book in medieval religion. The result is learning.

For this reason, this book both advocates for and demonstrates the continued and engaged study of the distant past in relation to other periods. This book is thus not only about the changing textual authority of a female author over time but also about the challenging textual authority of the past and its vital importance to our discipline.

Introduction: The Problem of Mechthild's Authorship

Authorship is a central problem not only for Mechthild of Magdeburg, the author of *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (*The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, hereafter referred to as *The Flowing Light*), but also for most of her readers, translators, and editors. Anxiety about her earthly authorship permeates the text itself. The editors of the medieval manuscripts present the book as a message from God sent to a holy maiden. Modern scholars debate the connection between the literary representation of Mechthild as author and a “real” historical Mechthild. Modern feminists champion her authorship as a moment of patriarchal resistance. All of these debates revolve around the following outline of Mechthild's life and transmission:

Mechthild of Magdeburg's book survives in complete form in a fourteenth-century Middle High German manuscript. It tells us that around 1230, a young noblewoman named Mechthild left her home and relatives to go to the city (Magdeburg) where she devoted herself to a life of religious contemplation and worship.¹ In addition to a short prologue that preceeds the first chapter of *The Flowing Light*, this manuscript also contains a Latin foreword, accompanied by a German translation, that was composed by a scribe. This foreword reports that the *helig maget* (holy maiden) who wrote the book was a beguine, a woman who chose a life of devotion without entering a religious order or making irrevocable vows.² According to further accounts in *The Flowing Light*, Mechthild began her religious life claiming to know only one person and happy that the resulting isolation from friends and family would bring her closer to God. About twenty years later (ca. 1250), at the encouragement of her confessor and spiritual supervisor, she began to write down accounts of *der ware gottes gruos* (the true greeting of God) she had been experiencing since the age of twelve (I, 2: 2 and IV, 2). The prologue to the book in a different manuscript also tells us that she continued writing for the next thirty years, spending the last decade or so of her life in a Cistercian convent in Helfta, a town southwest of Magdeburg. Mechthild's death has been placed between 1282 and 1287.³

Divided into seven books, *The Flowing Light* was the first collection of mystical revelations written down in the German vernacular. The letters of a fourteenth-century priest active in what is now southwestern Germany and Switzerland (Heinrich of Nördlingen) contain references to having translated *The Flowing Light* from a “foreign” (*fremdem*) German (between 1343 and

1345) into Heinrich's Middle High German (Alemannic) dialect.⁴ These references, taken in conjunction with references in the text to Magdeburg church officials, suggest that the source of the surviving manuscript was written in Middle Low German, the dialect local to the northeastern German-speaking region around Magdeburg. According to a scribal notation, Mechthild wrote up to and including Book VI *mit iren henden* (VI, 43: 4; by her hand). In the penultimate chapter of Book VII, she thanks God for the nuns at Helfta who helped her continue to write, presumably by taking dictation, when her hands and eyes failed her in old age (VII, 64: 6–10); unfortunately, no copy of the Low German original has survived. Two translations were made, however: In addition to Heinrich's translation, the Dominican friars at Halle began a translation into Latin while Mechthild was still alive and finished it sometime before 1298.⁵ Two manuscripts containing the Latin translation still exist, as does as a manuscript that translates the Latin version back into Middle High German. Heinrich's Middle High German translation survives in complete form in only one manuscript and in excerpted form in fifteen manuscripts.⁶ The latest of these nineteen manuscripts dates from the sixteenth century, after which time Mechthild's name and book more or less disappeared until 1861, when Carl Greith found a copy of Heinrich's translation in a monastery library in Einsiedeln, Switzerland. Gall Morel published an edition based on this manuscript in 1869.⁷ In 1877, the Latin translation was printed along with the writings of two other mystics from Helfta, the convent where Mechthild spent her final years.⁸ Hans Neumann's critical edition of the Middle High German version was completed in 1993.

Because of the complexity of her text's production, Mechthild invites us to reconsider the meanings and forms of medieval authorship. As Alistair Minnis has argued, "medieval theory of authorship was not homogeneous in the sense of being uncomplicated and narrowly monolithic."⁹ But the theory he presents in his book, stemming from the prologues to commentaries on the Bible in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and on literary prologues of the fourteenth century, does not consider the type of complicated situation represented by the details surrounding Mechthild's book outlined above.¹⁰ In Mechthild we have a writer who does not sign her own name, whose original text and language are little more than a supposition, whose writings survive only in late medieval copies of translations completed after her death, and whose editors mention her name only in passing if at all, attributing the authorship of the book to God in their prologues. Moreover, Mechthild's gender makes the text even more unstable, because the anxiety about authorship expressed in the text has much to do with women's perceived inadequacy to the task. Medieval female authorship in this case thus seems to be characterized by an absence rather than an assertion of authority. Mechthild seems to float in that nether world described by Clare Lees and Gillian Overing to which women are often relegated by clerical culture.¹¹ The situation of Mechthild's book in the manuscripts both represents and obscures

her authorship.

This is not to say that authorship and authority were simple matters for male theologians. In focusing on their attempts to theorize the roles performed by the *auctores* of Scripture, Minnis rightly points out that discussing an earthly *auctor* of a sacred text presented uncommon difficulties. *Auctor* was the term used to denote someone who was both a writer and an authority insofar as he was someone not only to be read, but also to be believed. *Auctoritas*—the authentic truth, which in the context of religious writing meant God’s truth—was what a text by an *auctor* was supposed to contain. As Minnis observes, “God, who had guaranteed the superlative *auctoritas* of Scripture, was the *auctor* of all created things as well as an *auctor* of words” (36). How then could a theologian assess the relative functions of God and man in producing a sacred text? How could he presume to discern between the contributions of each? The answer to this dilemma in the twelfth century was to favor an allegorical over a literal reading, the former being a focus on the divine truth in the text, the latter being inconsequential in comparison. In the thirteenth century, however, exegetes’ interest turned to the literal qualities of the texts, a change in emphasis facilitated by the adoption of the Aristotelian prologue. Briefly, the purpose of this prologue was to discuss the four causes of a text: (1) the efficient cause (the *auctor* who brought the text into being), (2) the material cause (the literary sources), (3) the formal cause (the pattern imposed by the *auctor*), and (4) the final cause (the end or objective aimed at by the writer).¹² According to Beryl Smalley, “[t]he scheme [of the four causes] had the advantage of focusing attention on the author of the book and on the reasons which impelled him to write.”¹³ And, as Minnis adds, “[t]he theory of efficient causality enabled the human *auctores* of Scripture to acquire a new dignity; the theory of formal causality provided the rationale for meticulous analysis of form both as style and as structure” (39). In this way, medieval commentators were able to consider and discuss the literary qualities of a scriptural text, thereby recognizing the literary authority of the human *auctor* whom God had graced with His inspiration.

It is no mere coincidence that the shift in theological interest from the *auctoritas* or divine truth of a scriptural text to its human *auctor* in the thirteenth century coincides with the publication of texts written by semi-religious or lay women as well as men who find themselves in the role of scriptural author—that is, those who are recording messages from and conversations with God. The thirteenth century witnessed the dawn of a widespread religious movement in central Europe that was characterized by a shift toward the human aspect of Christianity. This change involved a more complete and outspoken embrace of the humanity of Christ and His evangelical project. The ideal life for the average person, then, became the imitation of Christ and the apostles as represented by the acts of repentance, willful poverty, and preaching. New religious orders took up this charge by preaching in the vernacular. Women, inspired by this preaching and by the

intimate relationship with God represented in the Bible's Song of Songs, joined the devout ranks in great numbers. Anyone in this new context could be a lover or bride of God; anyone could be His messenger. The shift in focus to human *auctores* in scholastic commentaries thus finds a parallel in the embrace of the apostolic life by monastics and other religious. Imitating the apostles in their devotion to Christ, these new evangelists took on the role of human *auctor* personally.

By the 1250s, while Dominican schoolmen Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus were becoming prominent theological authorities in their own right (that is, not just writing about ancient *auctores*), Mechthild and her contemporaries, most notably the mystical writers Hadewijch and Beatrice of Nazareth from the Low Countries, were deeply involved in this new evangelism. Becoming an author of God's words, Mechthild recorded her visions of intimate conversations with God and others in the afterlife. Hadewijch wrote down her visions, composed instructional poetry, and crafted letters about the theology revealed to her and Beatrice of Nazareth wrote a short instructional treatise about the seven stages of loving God. The authority of each of these texts comes from its ostensible origin in the Holy Spirit and the circulation of their writings is bound in the same way as Scripture to the project of instructing and saving the soul. The central questions of this book about the historical valence of human authorship and the problems of textual authority are thus also questions that arise for the contemporaries of these women, particularly the priests or preachers responsible for their spiritual care: how should these writings be read? How should their human and female authorship be received and transferred? And do these women acquire the status of earthly *auctores*?

For today's historians of religion, Mechthild, Hadewijch, and Beatrice stand at the beginning of what historians now term a new era characterized by the rise of vernacular theology.¹⁴ This new era continues for the next two centuries and is evident in the writings of men and women across Europe.¹⁵ Other innovators in this vernacular tradition include Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), who wrote an instructional dialogue on divine love in Old French. Elements of this theology can also be found in the work of three earlier women mystics, but are then further developed in a more scholastic style by Meister Eckhart (d. 1329) in German.¹⁶ Eckhart's numerous vernacular sermons and treatises made him popular throughout the Dominican province of Teutonia where he served, as is evidenced by the presence of his works or writings attributed to him in countless devotional compilation manuscripts from the fifteenth century. Eckhart's student, Heinrich Seuse (d. 1366), arguably the most popular mystic of the Middle Ages, wrote not only his own *vita* but also three books of religious instruction, letters, and sermons in German. His works survive in hundreds of manuscripts.¹⁷ Richard Rolle (d. 1349) in England wrote mystical treatises in English and was an important influence for the later English women mystics, Julian of Norwich (d. after

1416) and Margery Kempe (d. ca. 1438).¹⁸ Both Julian and Margery also produced important books of revelations and theology in English.¹⁹

For all of these writers, their status as authors of God is inherently fraught with some tension. As Nicholas Watson writes in his study of Rolle: “Mystical writing fuses subjective experience and expression with absolute declarations as to the nature of truth; however submissive it may be in fact, it is thus heady and potentially uncontrollable, always in a position to lay powerful claims to an authority which lies outside and above ecclesiastical institutions, even to deny the authority which inheres in those institutions.”²⁰ Because of the complexities of mystical experience, its effects on the mystic’s conceptualization of him- or herself, and its potential for fracturing institutional authority, mystical writings are often characterized by recurring ambivalence toward both the mystical experience and the authority it confers.²¹ Doubts about the adequacy or orthodoxy of the written account and the authenticity of the divine source coincide with fears of critical responses from both friends and enemies. Such a complex situation for the construction of authorship and authority seem especially appropriate for a project aiming to broaden our understanding of medieval authorship. Indeed, Mechthild’s book offers us a particularly compelling way to examine this authorship quagmire because it attests to the presence of these doubts and fears not only in Mechthild and her contemporary readers but also in much of the book’s reception. Further, because the anxieties toward Mechthild’s authorship are often linked with anxieties about gender, our examination can help us be more specific about the role that gender has played in medieval conceptualizations of female authorship and authority.

In the late 1980s, German scholarship on Mechthild turned its full attention to the uncertainties about authorship created by Mechthild’s book and its transmission. Ursula Peters’s 1988 study of medieval religious writing as literature, for example, directly challenges the status of women like Mechthild as authors of the texts associated with them.²² Peters was responding to feminist literary studies of medieval women writers. In particular, she aimed to highlight a set of problematic assumptions about Mechthild’s biography and text, as well as those of other medieval women mystics, that formed the basis for some of the early feminist re-readings of this material.

The uncertainties created by the manuscript transmission of Mechthild’s book outlined above perhaps not surprisingly call into question not only the biographical details, but also Mechthild’s authorship itself. Yet feminist interest in medieval women, especially those who wrote, was (and still is) motivated by a concern with the ways women have been able to resist or transgress the limitations placed on them as women at different historical moments. In the 1980s and 1990s, this interest facilitated a renewed emphasis on biography when biographical criticism was decidedly out of vogue.²³ Mechthild’s status as a beguine, for example, as a woman living outside of the

structured religious and disciplinary community of the convent, has taken on a disproportionate importance for those who argue for a specific kind of feminine spirituality or feminine writing associated with the marginal positions occupied by women in western societies across time.²⁴ This scholarship, like most work on Mechthild before Peters, has tended to adopt without question the information about Mechthild's life patched together by a previous generation of scholars.²⁵ In addition, the German historian Peter Dinzelsbacher published a number of works in which he argued for reading texts like Mechthild's as factual accounts of mystical experience, as "factographies."²⁶ While Peters acknowledged feminist historian Caroline Walker Bynum's groundbreaking work on medieval women and religion as *perspektivenreich* (insightful),²⁷ she nevertheless grouped Bynum with others who, along with Dinzelsbacher, tended to read medieval religious texts by and about women (both female-authored and male-authored, Latin and vernacular) as records of actual religious practices and experience.²⁸

Responding to these developments, Peters tried to counter them by refocusing attention on the literary and material contingencies of medieval texts, thereby calling into question nearly every conclusion that had until this time been made about Mechthild's life. Peters points out that most of the information used to construct Mechthild's biography comes from the seemingly autobiographical statements made in *The Flowing Light*, the Latin foreword of the German version, or the prologue to the Latin translation, which are all based in large part on the information that is provided in the texts they introduce. The details that the Latin translators add, in particular the name of Mechthild's confessor (Heinrich of Halle) and the identification of the "brother B" mentioned in the text with Mechthild's biological brother Baldwin (VI, 42), Peters notes, have never been corroborated by other historical documents (independent of the Mechthild manuscript tradition) and therefore cannot be relied on as fact.²⁹ Peters argues instead for placing Mechthild's book (as well as Hadewijch's and Marguerite Porete's works) within a literary tradition of hagiography that was emerging among the Cistercians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Brabant and Liège. The so-called autobiographical statements in Mechthild's book refer less to Mechthild's lived experience, according to Peters, than to the conventions associated with these new forms of hagiography. That is, these authors (particularly Mechthild) adopt life stories that should be seen as representing generic holiness, not actual events. Peters concludes, then, that texts like Mechthild's can be viewed and analyzed only as literary constructs embedded in and fully determined by the literary traditions and conventions within which they emerge (be they religious or otherwise) and that as such they cannot be tied definitively to actual religious practices or experiences.³⁰

Peters's book has done the field a great service by reminding us of the ways in which speculation sometimes becomes taken as fact simply because a critical mass of scholars has accepted it as such. Peters is also right to direct

our attention back to the material history of the texts. Yet her overall conclusions imply a form of literary determinism that leads to a proverbial dead end. It is not difficult to see how such an absolute notion of history, a kind of negative empiricism might leave us with nothing to say. Moreover, this approach clearly results in a kind of overdetermination that leaves no room for agency.³¹ It is clearly not useful to argue, for example, that devotional texts are *only* the result of, first, the various influences from religious and patristic traditions and second, the force of a wave of religious reform in the thirteenth century. One wonders about the agents and recipients of these influences and forces. Indeed, the unwillingness to accept the existence of a text's author without corroboration from historical documents (independent of the manuscript transmission) clearly favors a history peopled by men. Even acknowledging that authorship means something entirely different in the medieval context, it makes little sense to disqualify any and all discussion of agency. Such an extreme position would mean that all medieval subjects who wrote religious texts were merely mouthpieces or vessels of God, genre, or tradition, however these may be defined.

In challenging the absolutes of Peters's argument, however, I am *not* claiming that Mechthild's text should be read solely as autobiography or as some kind of pure record of Mechthild's authorial activity. Rather, like Susanne Köbele, I find that the opposition Peters creates between viewing mystical authors as, on the one hand, records of actual persons and, on the other, "literary constructs" is misleading. It obscures the inter-connectedness of the two categories—the *Fiktion des Faktischen genauso wie die (wahrheitsfähige) Faktizität des Fiktiven* (the fiction of the factual exactly as it does the [truth bearing] factuality of the fictive).³² Peters's insistence on the either/or separation between the literary and the historical implies further that feminist and historicist goals are irreconcilable. According to this logic, the impulse to revise literary histories to include female authors would be read as historically irresponsible or anachronistic because the authorship of women writers like Mechthild is impossible to prove beyond any doubt. If we were to accept Peters's radically historicist argument, the uncertainty produced by the variance of medieval texts would invalidate the use of those texts in documenting a case of medieval female authorship, regardless of the motivation.

Feminist and historicist goals may seem incompatible to Peters, but in my view both are clearly still necessary. Although Peters argues in another essay that the literary critic can legitimately work with the different types of author-*roles* only as they are constructed in different literary genres, modern concepts of authorship continue to dominate literary studies and the canons this work constructs.³³ As Burghart Wachinger has recently argued, "a medieval author only becomes constituted *for us* in the transmission [of the text attributed to him or her]."³⁴ I emphasize "for us" because our systems of literary analysis, embedded as they are in institutions of literary scholarship, pedagogy, and

publishing, still privilege the focus on an author who can be named and placed in a historical context despite the inconsistent naming of authors in the extant manuscripts used to construct vernacular literary canons. Within the classical canon of medieval German literature, for example, the manuscripts transmitting Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* can offer us *no* instance of a title, *incipit*, or *explicit* formula in which Gottfried is named as the author of the work. Only in the prologues to the continuations, which are almost always transmitted with Gottfried's unfinished work, can we learn that Gottfried is the author. When a manuscript did not include a continuation or a prologue to the continuation, however, readers had no way of knowing who wrote *Tristan*.³⁵ As Wachinger suggests, this could mean either that the name of the author was not as important as the name of the tale, the story of Tristan having been circulating well before Gottfried's lifetime, or that the audience for the manuscripts already knew Gottfried was the author of *Tristan*, thereby making the signaling of his authorship unnecessary.³⁶ This is not just a quality limited to the transmission of the courtly classics, however. Wachinger's article lays out several other illuminating examples: a text called *Deutsche Sphaera* by Konrad of Megenberg is transmitted in five of the ten manuscripts without the author's name, although three of those do name the author of the Latin source; for a religious book like the *Büchlein von der Liebhabung Gottes*, only three of the seventy-five extant manuscripts name the correct author, Thomas Peuntner, while some name the author of Peuntner's main source, a sermon by Nikolaus of Dinkelsbühl, and most name no author at all; and we find a similar example for Latin transmissions in the case of the *Compendium theologicæ veritatis* of Hugo Ripelin of Strassburg—of the 469 Latin manuscripts originating in the German-speaking regions, two thirds name no author and in the others, nineteen different authors are credited.³⁷ Clearly, the source of authority in these medieval texts is not exclusively associated with an author's name.

Regardless of this apparent lack of consistency regarding author attributions for medieval bookmakers, the concept of a single, identifiable author continues to be central to most if not all present-day studies of medieval German literature. In the wake of poststructuralist suspicions of origins and fixed texts, new approaches to manuscript research have brought these disciplinary customs, which can be traced back to nineteenth-century foundational Germanists such as Karl Lachmann, decidedly into question.³⁸ And yet, even after Barthes and Foucault, the conventions of literary scholarship and pedagogy and the production of editions and translations continue to promote the idea that every text has a single author even if he or she is anonymous. For today's scholars, authorship at its most basic still amounts to the attribution of a text to a name. Despite the uncertainties about Gottfried's authorship that might be suggested by the specifics of the *Tristan* transmission, Gottfried's place in the canon of medieval German literature remains secure. He is still the man behind *Tristan*, however open or unfixed

the text itself may be.³⁹

The persistence of a single-author mentality in German *Mediävistik* must be seen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as connected to the aims of literary history embodied in the now standard reference work on medieval German literature—the *Verfasserlexikon* (Encyclopedia of Authors).⁴⁰ Although works are also listed by their title and only by their title when the author is not known, the name of the encyclopedia attests to the privileging of authorship as an organizing category of the medieval German literary tradition. No doubt, in theorizing about author-roles constructed rhetorically, Peters hopes to break free of this tradition. However, as H. L. Hix has argued in the context of debates about authorship inspired by Barthes and Foucault, “each of the views considered mistakes one aspect of the author for the whole, either the author as origin/cause of the text or as function/effect of the text, [but] a satisfactory view of authorship must recognize and integrate both of those aspects.”⁴¹ My examination of Mechthild and her book represents an attempt to explore such an integrative approach. It seeks to elucidate not only how Mechthild as a female author shaped her book but also how the transmission of the text does or does not constitute Mechthild the author as a function or an effect of the medieval book or the textual tradition it constructs. It looks for, in the terms offered by Clare Lees and Gillian Overing with regard to women in Anglo-Saxon society, a double agency, an agent who moves in the “real” world of medieval society but who is relegated, in this case, to a netherworld created not only by clerical culture but also by the ephemeral materiality of medieval texts.⁴²

The questions about female authorship informing this project (What has happened to Mechthild of Magdeburg and her book? What does her reception history tell us about the cultural valence of female authorship? What does it tell us about the relationship between gender and canonicity over time?) are therefore not (as Peters might argue) ahistorical or anachronistic. Indeed, they are issues raised by the material history of the texts themselves. In the case of *The Flowing Light*, the problem of authorship as a conflict about personal agency arises already in the prologue to the German version. The voice of the loving soul asks, “Eya herre got, wer hat dis buoch gemachet?” (Oh Lord God, who has made this book?) (Prologue, 8). Who indeed? For not only does God reply that he made this book, but both Mechthild and her editors repeatedly emphasize her secondary role as medium of God’s divine truth. As Jacqueline Miller has shown for the English context, and as Minnis argues for scholastic writers, this problem of authorship was common among most medieval writers and can be seen in efforts like these to balance competing and often contradictory concerns about authority and agency.⁴³ That is, the authors struggle with the implications of claiming a personal authority and agency vis-à-vis a text (“I write/create this and it is the truth/poetry”) as opposed to invoking the sanction of *auctores* (“as Augustine, Aristotle, Vergil, Scripture says, this is the truth”).

Certainly, as Peters suggests, we must take great care when making claims about what the author “Mechthild” may have “meant” when she wrote down her revelations. It is in fact impossible to know precisely what words were indeed written *mit iren henden* (by her hand) and which ones were added or changed by a compiler, translator, or copying scribe. Yet despite the problems with verifying Mechthild’s actual writing of *The Flowing Light*, the text as received, when read carefully and in context, can and does tell us something about Mechthild’s authorship. Indeed, whereas some critics have argued that the only author we can speak of in *The Flowing Light* is the *Autorgestalt* (author construct) produced in and by the book that acts to legitimize its truth claims, I take an alternative view.⁴⁴ Taking this construct solely as an authorizing mechanism and discounting any other kind of validity is both overly cynical and dehistoricizing.⁴⁵ Rather, I would argue that the *Autorgestalt* is indeed constructed in and by the text and that it can also be read dialectically in conjunction with other kinds of historical evidence as an indication of a female author’s particular response to the problems surrounding mystical and female authorship and authority in the thirteenth century.⁴⁶ Moreover, the editorial additions in the prologues to the Latin and German versions, especially if Peters is right in holding them to be primarily based on information in the revelations themselves, indicate that not only Mechthild but also her readers and scribes (the other potential “authors”) had to negotiate these problems. Mechthild’s female authorship is significant not only for me as a feminist medievalist interested in a more gender-balanced history of literature and concepts but also for the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century writers and readers interested in establishing the book as an authoritative religious text.

The particular conflict about authorship expressed in Mechthild’s text pits her agency as the writer of a book, the source of which is God himself, against her social role as a woman bound to silence by Church decree. Chapters 1 and 2 of this book focus on this struggle. Chapter 1 reads Mechthild’s use of the vernacular in the context of clerical and language politics in the Magdeburg region of Germany in the thirteenth century. The vernacularity of Mechthild’s book can be read as a reflection of authorial agency on two levels: First, I argue that writing in Middle Low German can be seen both as a choice against dictating to a Latin scribe and as a strategy that bypasses the hierarchies of clergy (Latin) and southern courts (Middle High German); second, while Mechthild’s circumventing of clerical language might suggest that her book represents a challenge to convention or orthodoxy (for some modern critics, reason enough to consider the significance of a particular writer), her critiques of the clergy, when seen in their historical context, demonstrate that orthodoxy and dissent are not always oppositional terms. Glimpses of Mechthild as an active author of her book are thus evident less in a perceived challenge to the clergy than in her open engagements with a contemporary debate about clerical authority.⁴⁷ Moreover, her real challenge to tradition

emerges on the level of form: Mechthild superimposes an enchanting lyricism onto the criticisms of corrupt churchmen, thus creating a form of poetic prose in German that was indisputably new.

While Mechthild's unique German prose can be indicative of her agency for us, her modern readers, agency for the context created by the book and its accompanying conceptual problems (female authority) is the subject of Chapter 2. Here I focus on the problem of mystical authority and authorship as worked out in Mechthild's striking vision of the mass (II, 4). I argue, first, that the problem of mystical authority for this beguine mystic paradoxically leads to the assertion of female authorship, which is made evident in the image of Mechthild as a poor maid who is suddenly transformed when wearing a cloak embroidered with her own poetry, and, second, that the negotiations of this problem necessarily implicate the cultural meanings of the female body circulating at this time. If Mechthild's maid initially feels limited by her sick body and wretched clothes, once she sees herself newly cloaked and crowned with garments bearing the signs of her own authorship, she overcomes the limitations manifested by her body and stands with angels and saints in the choir.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn from the responses to the problems of female authorship and femininity expressed in *The Flowing Light* to the responses of others as revealed in the manuscript transmission. Chapter 3 analyzes the two main redactions of the work (the Latin and Middle High German translations) and three of the German compilation manuscripts containing large selections of *The Flowing Light* (between twenty and ninety chapters). Chapter 4 looks at the eleven manuscripts containing only very short and anonymous excerpts of Mechthild's book and reads them in the context of the fifteenth-century "observance movement" to reform monastic practices among both male and female religious. While the two main redactions I examine at the beginning of Chapter 3 suggest that the problem of female authorship is related to the perceived audience of a given text (Mechthild's role as author must be downplayed for general or mixed-gender audiences), the compilations examined in Chapters 3 and 4 also show us how Mechthild's writings functioned within the dialogic devotional practices of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Insofar as the Mechthild selections are present in books with practical religious aims (guides for mystical contemplation or sermon writing), they are fulfilling the stated goals for the book—the spiritual edification of all religious people. The irony of achieving this goal, though, is that Mechthild's name becomes dissociated from the writings (a fate to which she herself would not have objected, wanting only God's glory, not her own). These manuscripts suggest that Mechthild's fall into obscurity results not only from the ideological problem of female authorship (the devaluing of an active authorial role for women) but also from the lively participation of her writings in a religious textual practice that placed little or no value on authors' names. Further, as Chapter 4 argues, Mechthild's text—mainly its devotional,

dialogic, and fragmentary form—can be seen as foundational for the literature produced in German-speaking regions as part of the observance movement. Yet the system of literary reproduction that emerges as a result of this movement, the uncontrolled copying of anonymous excerpts, means that the integrity of Mechthild's book and her reputation as its author are lost.

The exploration of what happened to Mechthild of Magdeburg's work produces unexpected results. While female authorship does present a conceptual problem to Mechthild herself as well as to her Latin translators, it is a problem that is addressed or resolved in order to assert the authority of her book. It is not the reason used to suppress it. Further looking for the problem of female authorship in the fragmentary transmission reveals complex systems of literary production and exchange in which textual authority does not always come from an attribution of authorship. Indeed, this part of the transmission offers insights into the relationship between medieval book production and the nascent culture and forms of both vernacular mysticism (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and observant reform (fifteenth century). Investigating precisely how and why Mechthild's book fades from view thus provides us with new knowledge not only about the significance of her book in its immediate contexts but also about the multitude of traditions it helped to construct.

As the concluding chapter will show, although Mechthild's book becomes completely unknown by the eighteenth century, there are a few traces that have surfaced from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These traces are the legacy of the Latin translation. Mechthild counts in traditions of prayer books as holy and in pamphlets debating the pros and cons of women's education as learned, but in the process of this limited transmission, her reputation merges with that of Mechthild of Hackeborn, her slightly younger contemporary in the convent at Helfta. Mechthild of Hackeborn did not author her own revelations, but her widespread veneration as a saint and noblewoman meant that the revelations associated with her were transmitted widely and continuously until the nineteenth century. Mechthild of Hackeborn's greater reputation thus in the end contributes to the disappearance of the last trace of the medieval transmission of Mechthild of Magdeburg.

We owe Mechthild's reemergence in the nineteenth century to the rediscovery of Heinrich of Nördlingen's German translation, which occurred at a time when literature in German was being used to define a German national identity. By contrast, Mechthild of Hackeborn, whose revelations were first recorded in Latin, has not experienced a renaissance (there is still no modern English translation of her book, although it was circulated in Middle English in the fifteenth century).⁴⁸ Mechthild of Magdeburg's book, however, excited notice because of its apparent relation to a tradition of German literature and of philosophy that had its roots in the vernacular writings of medieval Dominicans. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

the book was being evaluated according to gender biases. Hence we see the intensification of the problem of female authorship witnessed first in the Latin translation. These scholars link gender with the distinction between rational and irrational modes of discourse, a link framed in Romantic (and nationalist) aesthetics as well as in post-Reformation confessional disputes. Mechthild's text is thus subsequently transmitted in association with other women's texts in traditions for which concepts of immediacy and femininity become synonymous. Once again, authorship can only be attributed to the women insofar as their agency (rational, active authorship) is downplayed. Chapter 5 concludes by tracing this link as it resurfaces in modern anthologies of both medieval German literature and medieval women writers. These anthologies attest to the enduring tension in discussions about canon reform between proclaiming the legitimacy of women writers within existing canons and establishing them as a countertradition to those canons.

My exploration of Mechthild and her book seeks to develop an alternative to this seemingly unresolvable tension. If the question driving this study is What has happened to this female author and her book?, the more pressing question that underlies it is Does the answer matter to us? There are two major reasons why it does. It matters to us, first, because a literary history that more accurately reflects women's participation in the complex changes in literary production and reception over time can, I believe, raise awareness about what it means to be a woman both historically and now and thereby help to shape and change current ideological attitudes toward women for the better. It matters to us, second, because history itself matters and Mechthild's authorship has a history; it has been important in many different ways since *The Flowing Light* was first written. The reasons for this importance vary across time, and this variance matters, too, to our ongoing attempts to understand the history of authorship, books, mysticism, and literature, as well as the complex processes of canon formation.

Instead of using the category of women to critique a tradition from which a canon emerges, I try to suggest a critical and historical method for interrogating the category of tradition itself. It is my hope that by focusing on one female author, the contours of competing traditions and the intersecting interests informing them at different times will become clear. Mechthild's nineteenth-century reception shows us for instance that the initial importance of establishing a German (national) literary tradition outweighed the conceptual problems presented by a monumental female-authored text. It also shows us that not long thereafter, Mechthild's importance was again subordinated in histories of mysticism when a tradition of male originators and precursors was needed. The publication of Mechthild's book from the Middle Ages to modernity thus alerts us not only to the ideological power of the tradition-forming process but also to its historical mutability. Instead of trying to fight the power of a perceived monolithic tradition with the creation of another, I seek to shift the focus to specific cases, to the materiality of

textual production and transmission, to the resulting historicity of canons, and to the moments of alterity that remind us of canonical change. Because it seems clear that the assertion of traditions defined by the category of women has not fully succeeded in dismantling monolithic masculine canons, this book attempts to demonstrate that perhaps a renewed commitment to history will finally do the job.

Choosing the Vernacular: The Politics of Language and the Art of Devotion

Mechthild of Magdeburg began writing down her revelations in the midst of a new spiritual age. Whereas twelfth-century religiosity was characterized by an increased fervor for an austere, monastic life led by a select elite who had escaped the “shipwreck of the world,” thirteenth-century religiosity embraced the world as a place where anyone could strive to achieve religious perfection, whether in a religious order, begging in the town square, or in the home.¹ Both the Dominican and the Franciscan orders, also known as mendicant orders because they took vows of poverty and often lived from itinerant begging, were founded in the thirteenth century. These orders espoused a renewal of apostolic values; their aim was to teach all of God’s creatures about the proper way to live and worship God. An important means to this end was the preaching and teaching of religious doctrine in the vernacular, a practice that enabled the preachers to reach all levels of society. The result was a secularization of religion; any person, not just monks, nuns, and priests, could be a child, lover, or bride of God.²

The combination of expanded audiences with an increasingly widespread engagement with theological ideas in the vernacular led to innovation. The custom of using the language of love to describe the individual’s experience of God, promoted among monastics in the twelfth century chiefly by Bernard of Clairvaux, was both embraced and transformed in the thirteenth century. Mechthild’s book, for example, takes up Bernard’s interpretations of the Song of Songs—the book of erotic poetry in the Bible interpreted as an allegory for the relationship between the soul and God—and interweaves them with the secular and vernacular literary forms and ideas of courtly literature to produce new forms of vernacular mysticism and theology.³ Both men and women were drawn in great numbers to the patterns of religious life that accompanied these innovations, coming together in religious communities both within and outside of church institutions. In the thirteenth century, women’s participation in shaping these new ideas was especially significant.⁴ As Bernard McGinn argues, “it is fair to say that the great age of women’s theology begins in 1200.”⁵ Mechthild’s life spans this age and her writings represent some of the first vernacular writings to articulate the developments in theology and religious life that we have come to know as the new mysticism or vernacular theology.⁶

The composition of *The Flowing Light* in German is thus historically

significant. This chapter explores this significance for an understanding of Mechthild's authorship and agency. In contextualizing Mechthild's linguistic situation in the light of contemporary male and female mystics and her association with the Dominican order and its mission to correct and instruct erring Christians, I make the following two claims: first, that writing in Middle Low German is, in a complex way, an attempt to reach out to a different kind of universal audience ("all religious people" named in the text's prologue, that is, clergy, monks, nuns, *and* laity) and therefore a sign of authorial agency insofar as it represents a choice; and second, that the convergence of Mechthild's political sympathies for the Dominicans, her adoption of their mission, an engagement with current debates about the role of mendicants in pastoral care, and her particular literary abilities produces a new kind of poetic prose in German.

The significance of the vernacular for thirteenth-century religious innovations is now undisputed. As McGinn has argued from the perspective of the history of religion, so the Germanist Susanne Köbele, following Kurt Ruh, argues that the key to vernacular mysticism is the language itself, and that the newness of the ideas required the metaphorical expression available in the vernacular.⁷ Nicholas Watson in the field of English medieval studies has made a case for the theological conceptualization of the vernacular in terms of the new emphasis in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on the life of Christ.⁸ That is, the gesture that God made in taking material form as a poor and humble carpenter's son is mimicked in his choice to inspire various writers, both women and men, in their mother tongue. As Watson explains: "In some contexts, discussions of the status of the vernacular and the implications of using it for written expression became so involved with theological questions whose roots were in the doctrine of incarnation that language politics and incarnational theology became coterminous. Under these conditions, the very act of writing in the vernacular had theological implications, while the symbol of the 'mother tongue' could be linked to quite specific theological positions and controversies."⁹ These broad discussions of the significance of the vernacular contest previously held explanations for its appearance in the German context: In the case of Mechthild, because of a statement made in the book, it is generally assumed that she did not write in Latin simply because she could not. Similarly, early historians of mysticism in Germany attributed the emergence of vernacular mysticism by men (most notably, Meister Eckhart, Heinrich Seuse, and Johannes Tauler) to the demands made on the mendicant orders in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to care for the unlearned semireligious women, tertiaries, or nuns in their midst, demands which resulted in what these scholars regarded as a simple transposition of scholastic thought into German.¹⁰ Even as recently as 1983, Walter Haug argues that ". . . im Prinzip könnte man sich seine [Eckharts] Predigten genausogut lateinisch wie deutsch denken" (in principle, one could imagine Eckhart's sermons just as easily in Latin as in German).¹¹

However, the work of McGinn, Ruh, Köbele, and Watson on the cultural meaning of the vernacular suggests that even in cases like Mechthild's text, in which we find a first person statement lamenting her lack of Latin ability, we must nevertheless investigate the significance of the vernacular as the language of composition. Although the association of women religious and the vernacular may seem straightforward, closer scrutiny of specific situations reveals this to be a complex issue.¹² Indeed, here is an instance where heeding Ursula Peters's warning not to take Mechthild's statements about herself at face value produces much more information about Mechthild's active choices as an author;¹³ evidence emerges not only for Mechthild's choice of the vernacular but also for the strategic understanding of that choice in terms of the mission of the mendicant preachers with whom Mechthild claims to be associated in the writings. My aim, then, is to examine the context of thirteenth-century religious practices and the related politics of language in order to demonstrate that these historical conditions can be understood only in terms of the ways they have been negotiated by an agent.

The first part of this chapter will explore the broader claims of Mechthild's book in the context of her religious peers and the Dominican mission to correct and instruct erring Christians. Sent by God to "all religious people, both the bad and the good," Mechthild's book claims a wide and general audience.¹⁴ Endowed by God "with the power and voice of all creatures," Mechthild's soul claims to represent that audience in her dealings with the divine.¹⁵ As these two passages suggest, Mechthild's book is meant to be read by more than her confessor. The tone of the address in much of her book implies a claim to speak to all, and in that sense, marks a claim on a universal voice. However, as we shall see, rather than have her revelations written down in Latin in the tradition of Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau, Mechthild's twelfth-century predecessors, Mechthild writes in her native tongue—Middle Low German, the dialect spoken in northern Germany (from the lower Rhein to Prussia). German, like its Germanic relative, English, is a language made up of a number of regional dialects. The Low German used by Mechthild exists in relation not only to official and clerical Latin but also to the language of the southern courts, Middle High German. It has often been noted that the revelations and visions concerning the mystical relationship with the divine (which dominate Books I and II of *The Flowing Light*) display prominently the imagery and inflections of courtly literature, most of which was composed and performed in Middle High German.¹⁶ Understanding the significance of the use of Middle Low German is complicated by the book's invocations of Middle High German literary forms and traditions. An exploration of this unusual situation will thus reveal that we must view the choice of the vernacular not only in terms of the relation between German and Latin but also in terms of other linguistic, literary, religious and political tensions: specifically, those between High and Low German, divine and courtly love, court and town, center and frontier.

Frontier is a relative term in this context. Magdeburg lies on the banks of the Elbe. The area to the east and north across the river was a border region that was heavily contested by Slavs and Germans as far back as the eighth century.¹⁷ Although Magdeburg had been an archbishopric since the tenth century and by the thirteenth century was a thriving Christian urban center, from the perspective of the recently established Dominican order of the 1250s, it was still in need of missionizing aid.¹⁸ These missionizing efforts would have been focused less on converting Slavs than on bringing erring Christians back to the fold and would have involved a program of traveling to different parishes, preaching to congregations as well as in public, and providing spiritual guidance through confession. Placing Mechthild's book in the context of this mission enables us to see her negotiations of the tensions it produced (exemplified in the use of Middle Low German) as central to the book's simultaneously universal and local appeal. Aligning herself with the Dominicans, Mechthild takes up their mission to reform erring members of the Church, itself perceived as a universal or global entity. From the perspective of Rome, this is a mission reaching out universally to all and from the center to the margins. From the perspective of Magdeburg, reaching out universally means using the language of the hometown.

The second part of this chapter takes a closer look at the implications of making universal claims in the vernacular rhythms of courtly literature. Understanding Mechthild's project as both defying social hierarchies and claiming a universal audience might suggest to modern readers that her book should be considered radical, perhaps belonging to a tradition of Christian dissenters or even heretics. However, in her anthology of medieval women writers, Katharina Wilson attributes Mechthild's and other women mystics' absence from literary canons to the fact that their writing is not unorthodox or radical enough.¹⁹ This ambiguity cries out for closer scrutiny. Indeed, exploring the question of Mechthild's orthodoxy, as we shall see, reveals a complicated situation in which the easy opposition at work in the traditions to which Wilson refers—radicality is good, conformity bad—proves inappropriate for understanding Mechthild's situation. For Mechthild's often unabashed critique of corrupt priests, taken together with her praise of Dominican preachers, illustrates that dissent and orthodoxy often go hand in hand, while a determination of heresy depends on a judgment of a higher authority. If some parish priests found her words critical, then the Dominicans were likely to claim the righteousness of those same words. She embraces positions held by authorities to be potentially challenging or heretical only in obedience to her Dominican advisors. Similarly, her vehement critiques of errant priests never question priestly authority. Further, Mechthild's engagement with contemporary issues surrounding clerical jurisdiction reveals her agency as she negotiates the competing interests in a debate about clerical authority.

The careful analysis of Mechthild's book in relation to the question of her

orthodoxy thus forces us to acknowledge and reconfigure the conceptual categories with which we tend to evaluate literary achievement. It also provides further evidence of Mechthild's agency as a writer, thinker, and composer of text. Dissent is not radical in this context but rather conventional. Heresy is not a fixed set of ideas but rather a label or a judgment by those in power over their subordinates. Mechthild's literary originality lies not in any potentially heretical content, I suggest, but rather in the way she obeys an orthodoxy promoted by the Dominicans. For in advocating for the Dominican mission, she uses a new poetic vernacular prose. As we shall see, what initially looks like dissent—the critique of corrupt priests—is not new. However, Mechthild's lyrical German prose clearly is. Mechthild uses poetic language both to soften and to reinforce her critiques of the clergy, providing further evidence of her active role in composing the text. The result is often beautiful in a startling, evocative, and compelling way, and it contributes to the distinctive aesthetic enchantment of her writing. Mechthild's agency, her active "transmission" of God's message, underscores the point not only that dissent is a relative term, but also that religious devotion can be an art.

Choosing the Vernacular

I begin by demonstrating that the appearance of the vernacular in Mechthild's writings was a matter of choice rather than an accident of historical circumstances. This choice can best be understood in relation to various external conditions like the make-up of the audience (lay or female or both), status (lay versus cloistered), and education (monastic versus courtly, women's versus men's). As we shall see, however, the vernacular's appearance cannot be fully explained by any single cause. The factor of the audience, for example, is certainly important, but only if we consider a complex view of that audience in relation to the Dominican mission. Similarly, education is also important, but not merely in terms of whether an individual receives instruction in Latin; rather this factor becomes more complicated when we see that the type of education received is related to the choice of a particular form of religious life.

To contest the notion of accident with regard to Mechthild's use of the vernacular, we need only look at the introductory comments to both the German and the Latin versions of her text that have survived. The German version of *The Flowing Light*, best represented in the Einsiedeln manuscript (E) contains a Latin foreword of about a paragraph, followed by a kind of subject index describing what theological topics the book covers, which in turn is followed by a German translation of the initial Latin paragraph. In this foreword, the scribe declares explicitly that the writings have come from God to a beguine sister in German.²⁰ The prologue to the Latin version also mentions that the revelations were "written in a primitive tongue" and that

they contain “certain marvelous and previously unknown mysteries.”²¹ For both redactions, then, it was important for readers to know that the book was originally composed in German.

We may very well wonder why this is the case. The first and most obvious reason is that it was an unusual occurrence. Indeed, although Mechthild was not the first German woman to be associated with visionary writings, she was the first to write a book of mystical prose in German that was not a translation or adaptation of a Latin source.²² By the 1340s when Heinrich of Nördlingen translated the Low German into his native Alemannic (a High German dialect), the writing of devotional texts in German by the semireligious (for example, beguines like Mechthild) as well as by nuns had become a much more common practice.²³ However, when Mechthild wrote down her revelations, it was not. In the twelfth century, two German visionaries became known for their numerous writings: Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Elisabeth of Schönau (ca. 1129–1164), both nuns of the Benedictine order. Hildegard was fluent in Latin, but she was not schooled in learned theological writing. She dictated in Latin to her scribe or wrote out notes on wax tablets and her scribe later polished and then presented the finished product.²⁴ Elisabeth also dictated her visions in Latin, although some that she received in German had to be translated into Latin.²⁵ There are at least 145 manuscripts of Elisabeth’s visionary works and the first printed edition dates to 1513.²⁶ Nineteen of these manuscripts date definitively to the twelfth century or earlier and all nineteen are in Latin. Elisabeth’s works were translated into a number of vernaculars—French, Provençal, Icelandic, and German—but the earliest (into Icelandic) dates from the fourteenth century and all seven German translations are from the fifteenth century or later.²⁷ In the twelfth century, then, Latin as the language of visionary texts is the norm. The vernacular composition of *The Flowing Light* thus marks a break with the custom of recording visionary texts in the universal and sacred language of the church.

That writings of Mechthild of Hackeborn (1241/42–1298) and Gertrud the Great (1256–1301/02), Mechthild of Magdeburg’s younger contemporaries at Helfta, are recorded in Latin, too, suggests that the transcribing of visionary material in Latin continued as a convention even as the use of the vernacular increased. That Mechthild of Hackeborn and Gertrud were also cloistered from a young age suggests that another factor influencing the writing is the kind of education and cultivation received in Benedictine and Cistercian convents at this time, as opposed to that received by semireligious such as Mechthild of Magdeburg who were supervised by mendicant friars. Although Anne Clark correctly notes that Elisabeth and Hildegard’s visionary works mark a transition in visionary writing that breaks with past models and points forward to women visionaries like Mechthild of Magdeburg of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,²⁸ Mechthild can nevertheless be distinguished from her predecessors by the fact that when she begins writing, she is neither a

member of a recognized order nor cloistered. Further, she does not have Hildegard's fluency in Latin or anything like Hildegard's position of authority as founder and abbess of a convent; she also lacks official permission to write from the Pope, which Hildegard had received with the help of Bernard of Clairvaux. Nor does she have a brother like Elisabeth's living in an adjoining monastery in order to "manage" her visions for dissemination in Latin. These distinctions might lead us to attribute the emergence of the vernacular at this juncture to the fact that Mechthild is an uncloistered laywoman who therefore would not have had access to the kind of education or secretarial support available to the nuns of Rupertsberg, Schönau, or Helfta.²⁹ This factor is certainly a part of the story but it is not all of it. We recall that Mechthild spent the last decade of her life in the convent of Helfta and as such, she did have secretarial support available to her while she wrote book VII of *The Flowing Light*—indeed, in one of the last chapters of the book, Mechthild thanks God for the help (presumably with dictation) that she received from others once she lost the use of her eyes and hands (VII, 64: 6–8). Yet, even when she had the resources available for having her book written down in Latin, she continued in the vernacular.

Mechthild was not the only woman in Northern Europe who wrote a mystical text in the vernacular in the thirteenth century, and a few words about her contemporaries make us see why scholars are now arguing for a direct relationship between the newness of the mystical ideas appearing in the thirteenth century and the vernacular language used to express them. Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268), ten years Mechthild's senior, lived as a nun at three different convents in the vicinity of Liège. As a Cistercian nun, Beatrice would presumably have been taught that Latin was the appropriate language for sacred writings, but her *vita* reports that she kept a secret written record of her revelations in the vernacular (Middle Dutch), writings that, except for one treatise, are now lost. If we can believe this Latin *vita*, which was written after her death and based on the lost vernacular writings and on interviews with friends and family, then we know her to have received a fairly extensive education. While living with beguines in Zoutleeuw, Beatrice went to a local school where she was instructed in the liberal arts. Upon entering the convent as an oblate at the age of ten, she continued her education and was taught the art of writing so that she could copy liturgical and musical books for the choir.³⁰ In Beatrice's case, then, we know that she could write Latin and we can assume she also understood what she wrote, although of that we cannot be certain. We also know that she wrote in Dutch. Beatrice's situation, having access to convent education and possibly the ability to compose in Latin, suggests that the choice of the vernacular for visionary writings is not *purely* contingent on the person's status as lay or cloistered, beguine or nun.

Another contemporary of Mechthild's, writing in Middle Dutch, is Hadewijch (who was active in the 1240s). Hadewijch's writings, which include letters, visions, and poetry, are all in the vernacular and, because of

allusions to a beguine audience in the writings themselves, she is thought to have been a beguine. Although we know nothing of Hadewijch's early life and education, it is clear from her frequent citations and allusions to theologians like Hugh of St. Victor as well as quotations from the Vulgate bible that she was able at the very least to read Latin fluently. Yet, she also chose the vernacular. In her case, the most significant factor might indeed have been an audience of fellow beguines. Nevertheless, the fact that Letter 12, for example, was addressed to the male superior of a local monastery reminds us that her audience was not always uniform.³¹

Agnes Blannbekin, a beguine mystic from Vienna, is also worth mentioning briefly. Born at the latest in 1244 and her death recorded as 1315 in one of the manuscripts, Agnes dictated her life and revelations in German to her Franciscan confessor, who wrote them down in Latin.³² Agnes, the life reports, was a farmer's daughter who, at the age of ten, decided to become a beguine. By the age of sixteen, she had fulfilled this desire and had moved into private living quarters in the city. She must have had a dowry at her disposal, for she did not have to work. In a chapter about her perusal of a Book of Hours, the life reports that Agnes could read (chapter 127).³³ It is unclear whether she could write. In this case, then, we have a beguine like Mechthild who dictates to a Latinate scribe, like Elisabeth the Benedictine nun. Whereas Beatrice, also a nun, kept secret accounts of her visions in the vernacular, Agnes, a beguine, dictates in the vernacular so that her revelations can be recorded in Latin. The lack of education or status associated with beguine life does not necessarily mean a text cannot be produced in Latin.

The French mystic Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), a beguine like Mechthild, also chose to write in the vernacular. References to Scripture in her book suggest that she, too, was familiar with some Latin, although little to nothing is known of her early life and education. Yet her choice of the vernacular, as in Mechthild's case, seems purposeful, as it is aligned with both the form and the mission of the text: Marguerite takes her literary models from courtly romance and writes a dialogue between the soul, reason, and divine love that is supposed to act as a spiritual guide for the religiously inclined ("actives and contemplatives, and perhaps those annihilated by true love").³⁴ Looking further south, we have the example of Angela of Foligno from Italy (1248/49–1309), who became a Franciscan tertiary after the death of her husband and children and who recounted her extraordinary visions and experiences in her vernacular to a Franciscan friar who recorded them in Latin.³⁵ Angela, because of the emotive and sometimes violent quality of her piety, is often compared to the later English mystic Margery Kempe (1373–1438), also known for her bouts of pious tears and cries. Like Angela, Margery had also married and had many children, but Margery's conversion came while her family still lived. While Margery's revelations were also recorded by an amanuensis, they were written down in Middle English, not in Latin.³⁶

The variety of circumstances evident in these examples indicates that the

choice of language for the visionary writings in question cannot be reduced to only one factor, whether it be beguine versus cloistered status or the status or gender of an audience. There are similarities between the visionaries considered here and the texts by or about them; but there are just as many variants in their circumstances and settings. For example, all of the texts might be categorized as being visionary—that is, stemming from visions—but not all are mystical—that is, articulating a love relationship between the soul and God (Mechthild, Hadewijch, Beatrice, and Marguerite). Hildegard's writings are not particularly concerned with describing the raptures of mystical union. Rather, they are concerned primarily with passing along God's messages.³⁷ The texts of Mechthild, Hadewijch and Beatrice share a poetic interest in *Gottesminne* (divine courtly love), all of them adopting language from the vernacular traditions of courtly love lyric to varying degrees. Both Mechthild and Hadewijch were beguines, and Beatrice lived among beguines when she was young. For this reason, these three writers are often grouped together under the category of beguine mysticism. Barbara Newman in turn emphasizes their common focus on *minne* (courtly love) in coining the term, *la mystique courtoise* to describe their writings. She includes Marguerite Porete in this category, who was called a beguine in the documents associated with her condemnation.³⁸ Both Hadewijch and Mechthild seem to have been educated in a courtly setting, perhaps also Marguerite, but Beatrice was educated in a town and in a convent, her father being a rent collector and manager for the first convent Beatrice joined. The nuns of Helfta seem to share certain theological interests with Mechthild and Hadewijch, in particular a special focus on the Eucharist and the sacred heart. Further, their writings appear to be mystical where those of Hildegard and Elisabeth (also in the convent setting, also writing in Latin) are much more prophetic. Yet, the Helfta nuns choose to write not in the vernacular but in the conventional language of the Church.

The increasing use of the vernacular for devotional writings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was not a phenomenon exclusive to women. Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1328) as well as his younger contemporaries Johannes Tauler (1300–1368) and Heinrich Seuse (1295–1366) all authored Latin and German treatises and sermons. These are only the most well-known figures.³⁹ A similar movement in religious writing by men develops in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁰ To describe each of these men and the situation of their writings would go beyond the scope of this study, but I will mention a few relevant points. While the evidence strongly suggests that Mechthild, Hadewijch, and Beatrice all composed and wrote down their texts in their mother tongues even if, in the case of Mechthild and Beatrice, some or all of those originals are now lost, much of Eckhart's extant vernacular writing found in compilation manuscripts stems from notes taken by students or various men and women who listened to his sermons.⁴¹ We might think back to Elisabeth of Schönau and ask, was it

her choice or her brother Eckbert's that her writings were published in Latin? Similarly, was it Eckhart's choice that his sermons and talks should appear in writing in the vernacular? In Elisabeth's case, Anne Clark argues for an active negotiation and collaboration between Elisabeth and her brother.⁴² In Eckhart's case, although the records suggest that he himself wrote sermons and treatises in German for dissemination, he was especially concerned with the reception of those writings by others. Indeed, it was these copied-down writings that drew accusations of heresy from papal authorities.⁴³ Heinrich Seuse, perhaps because of Eckhart's difficulties, took it upon himself to organize an authoritative version of his vernacular writings. As he states in the prologue, he collected in his *Exemplar* the books he had written in their complete and correct form and circulated them while he was still alive and could vouch for them. In this way, he hoped to protect himself from the dangers of unauthorized and incorrect versions.⁴⁴ Interestingly, in his *vita* Seuse notes that he based the life on an account of him written by Elsbeth Stigel, one of the women in his spiritual care. Stigel in turn based her account on Seuse's letters to her, making the question of authorship and the related choice of language that much more complex.⁴⁵

It should be clear from this discussion that the relationship of Latin to the vernacular and the reasons for choosing one over the other varied considerably in each of these situations and therefore justifies closer attention to one situation, rather than an attempt to draw generalizations from many. As such, a more detailed exploration follows of the situation in which Mechthild begins to write in the vernacular.

MECHTHILD'S CHOICE

At the end of an early vision in her book, Mechthild abruptly breaks off her narrative to claim, "Nu gebristet mir túsches, des latines kan ich nit" (Now my German fails me; I do not know Latin) (II, 3: 48). While scholars have generally accepted this statement as sincere, it is doubtful that Mechthild knew no Latin at all.⁴⁶ Indeed, most German noblewomen at this time (unlike men) were taught the rudimentaries of Latin for reading purposes.⁴⁷ Knowledge of Latin thus began with the Psalter, which young girls were encouraged to memorize before they reached marriageable age in case they were directed to enter a convent. As Marie-Luise Ehrenscheidtner's research on German Dominican nuns has shown, women who chose to pursue a religious life were able to recite some prayers and parts of the liturgy in addition to the Psalter, but only a few could understand or write Latin word for word.⁴⁸ These late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century women had access to Latin education, but they were not required to learn Latin and, with the notable exception of the nuns at Unterlinden, preferred to write in the vernacular.⁴⁹

If we accept the assumption that Mechthild was raised in a courtly setting in a family of lower nobility, as well as the statement in her book that she ran away to Magdeburg as a young adult, then whatever education she did receive happened while she was at court. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for precisely which court this might have been. Nor is there any evidence of her having received additional education from the Dominicans. Nevertheless, it seems likely that, like the nuns Ehrenschwendtner writes about, Mechthild knew some Latin but not enough to write it herself. The evidence of her contemporaries at Helfta as well as that of Beatrice and Agnes suggests that Mechthild's lack of Latin did *not* mean that she had no choice *other* than to write in her native language. The case of Agnes notwithstanding, the environment of the monastery at an earlier age was more likely to have afforded Mechthild not only the means with which to write or to have her book written in Latin but also, depending on which monastery, the impetus to do so. From this perspective, we can view Mechthild's choice of the vernacular as rooted also in her choice of a particular form of religious life. Given the increasing number of paths for religious devotion at this time, we must consider the possibility that Mechthild could also have chosen to enter a convent at a younger age, but she chose not to.

Although it was a matter of law that before women were married, their life decisions were made for them by their nearest male relatives and after they were married, by their husbands, we can nevertheless find evidence of women making choices in spite of such laws. Changes to canon law regarding marriage around 1200, particularly the introduction of consent laws, were meant to prevent marriages made against the will of either party. In practice, however, the law was directed primarily at women, who more often than men were forced—either by family pressure or after having been abducted or raped—to marry against their will.⁵⁰ Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that we find numerous young women after 1200 indicating their lack of consent to marry by choosing a particular religious path. Ida of Nivelles (1197/99–1231) was nine years old when she fled her home to a community of beguines to escape an arranged marriage. She entered a Cistercian convent seven years later.⁵¹ Yolanda of Vianden defied her parents' wish for her to marry, insisting on entering a local, recently founded Dominican convent. Relenting in part, her parents suggested a more established Cistercian convent with which their family had connections, but Yolanda held her ground and eventually got her way.⁵² Beatrice of Nazareth is also said to have expressed an ardent wish to enter an order, to which her father relented when she was ten.⁵³ Like Ida, Mechthild chose to flee her friends and family to live in the city as a beguine. Like Yolanda, Mechthild chose a less institutionally established form of religious life. Unlike Ida, however, Mechthild did not enter a monastery until she was sixty years old.⁵⁴

An inclination against monasteries emerges also in a dialogue in which Mechthild takes a critical stance toward traditional cloistered monastic life.⁵⁵

In this chapter, the personification of love, “Lady Minne,” criticizes the foolish soul who describes herself as living “in einem heligen orden, ich vaste, wachen, ich bin ane hovbtsünde, ich bin gnuog gebunden . . .” (II, 23: 8–9; in a holy order, I fast, perform vigils, I am without cardinal sins, I am well bound . . .) In the way of life described here, Lady Minne finds fault: “Du bist me bekumbert mit dinem huntlichen lichamen denne mit Jhesu, dinem sussessem herren” (II, 23:14–16; you are more concerned with your dog-like body than with Jesus, your sweet Lord). Specifically, as Susanne Köbele argues, in its efforts to suppress or defeat the body, the ascetic monastic life places too much emphasis on the body and thereby prevents transcending or transfiguring the body in the experience of union.⁵⁶ Köbele adds that this statement should not be taken as a wholesale critique. Rather, Mechthild is against the stagnation (*ruowe*) and self-satisfaction (*boese gewonheit*) that is sometimes the result of the ordered life.⁵⁷ Supporting this claim is a chapter in Book III in which Mechthild praises a true *geistliche swester* (religious sister) who speaks *aus dem waren liehte* (out of the true light) in contrast to a *weltliche begine* (worldly beguine) who speaks from out of her flesh with Lucifer’s spirit (III, 24: 3–6). Nevertheless, an impression that the life of the monastery did not necessarily promote the kind of devotion Mechthild favored is conceivable as a reason for her choice of the beguine existence.

When Mechthild chose the life of a beguine in the city, she was deciding against the ways of the monastery, which might have led her to have her writings published in Latin first. However, when Mechthild obeys her confessor’s and God’s commands to write down her revelations, she does not ask for an amanuensis as Elisabeth or Agnes did, nor does she hide her German writings until she is on her deathbed as Beatrice did. Rather, she allies herself with her confessor’s order and its mission to preach and teach in the world, a mission for which the vernacular proved to be an essential tool.⁵⁸

MIDDLE LOW GERMAN AND THE UNIVERSAL

In exploring Mechthild’s interpretation of the Dominican’s reformist mission, it is necessary to understand the use of German in the Magdeburg area. On the western banks of the Elbe and established as an Archbishopric by Otto I in 968, Magdeburg was one of several important launching points for the so-called *Ost-kolonisation* of the Slavic regions east of the river, which took place between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.⁵⁹ By the time Mechthild began to write, the mendicant orders were well established in the region; by 1250, both Franciscans and Dominicans had founded numerous houses in Magdeburg and in settlements to the north and east.⁶⁰ Because the mendicant mission itself, especially for the Dominicans, was aimed more at correcting the errors of mistaken Christians (among them, the laity) than at converting Slavs, the friars necessarily turned to the vernacular to reach their public.⁶¹ In

German speaking regions at this time, however, the situation was complicated by the fact that the different dialects stood in some tension with one another, reflecting differences not only of locality but also of social position, lifestyle, and culture. By around 1200, for example, Middle High German was the “standard” language for courtly lyric or *Minnesang* as well as for courtly epic and romance.⁶² Even poets whose native dialects were Low or Middle (central) German used the vocabulary, style and forms of High German from the southern dialects (Swabian, Alemannic, Franconian, and Bavarian). Because most courtly poets relied on royal or noble patronage and because the most important courts tended to be in the south, the language of these courts became a sort of literary lingua franca.⁶³ Eilhart of Oberge, for example, hailing either from a village near Braunschweig south of Hannover or from the lower Rhein, was commissioned around 1170 to translate the French Tristan romance and, instead of using what would have been his native Low German, he composed directly in High German, using “southern” rhyme and verse technique.⁶⁴ The author of the Middle High German *Eneit* (completed ca. 1185), Heinrich of Veldeke, is probably the most well-known example: His work displays elements of his native Limburg dialect, and yet all the surviving manuscripts are in Middle (central) or High German. Scholars have long disputed the language of composition, generally concluding that he either wrote a Low German version using rhymes and vocabulary that High German scribes would not need to change, or he wrote in High German like Eilhart.⁶⁵ Middle High German as a literary language continued to be a model for Low German poets well into the thirteenth century, as is evidenced by Mechthild’s contemporary, the Magdeburg patrician Brun of Schonebeck, who composed a Middle High German verse paraphrase of the Song of Songs in 1275/76.⁶⁶

While a culture of written Middle High German poetry and narrative developed mainly at the courts of the regional aristocracy (the royal court, in contrast to those in England and France, being less important), a parallel vernacular movement took place in the context of the town. In addition to mendicant friars preaching in the local dialects, thirteenth-century Magdeburg and surrounding town centers began to record their city laws, peace treaties, and chronicles in Middle Low German.⁶⁷ Indeed, the colonization of the east, the development of towns, and the growing trade between them (for example, the development of the Hanseatic League) accounts for a widespread use of Middle Low German as a written language by the mid-fourteenth century.⁶⁸

Mechthild’s book marks a convergence of these developments for this region—that of Middle High German as the dominant language of poetry, of Middle Low German as the increasingly used language of administrative prose, and of the centrality of the vernacular to the religious mission she adopts. As a beguine and not a nun, Mechthild lived within the city walls of Magdeburg and was supervised by local Dominicans. She could not write in Latin; yet, as argued above, she charted a new course in disregarding the more scholastic convention of dictating to a scribe who records in Latin. In

searching for an appropriate vocabulary to express the inexpressable, Mechthild invokes the secular language of courtly love to describe her mystical relationship and visions. Frank Tobin notes that “[a]s best as one can reconstruct, Mechthild wrote in a form of medieval Low German with bits of Middle German interspersed, especially in the lyric sections.”⁶⁹ Being on the southern edge of the Middle Low German-speaking region and having grown up in a courtly setting, Mechthild is familiar enough with courtly literature to allude to it, but not enough to write directly in Middle High German verse like Brun of Schonebeck. Nevertheless, even if in the case of Middle Low German versus Middle High German Mechthild had no choice, her choice to invoke the courtly milieu of the south in the language of the urban milieu of the north still proves to be significant. Like the author of the *Sächsishe Weltchronik* (albeit for different reasons), she is interested in carrying out God’s command to “present [her revelations] generally to the people” (*den lüten algemeine vore bringen*).⁷⁰

Middle Low German thus in effect bypasses the traditional clergy (parish priests, university-trained theologians, bishops, papal legates) and facilitates a more direct access to the members of an (at that time) expanding linguistic community. Invoking the language of the court while using the language of the city extends this audience to the elite for whom courtly poetry and Middle High German is a model, even as the content suggests the need for its reform. In Book IV, for example, Mechthild writes of a woman who had renounced the world to become a beguine and yet *wolte dennoch zu hove dienen* (IV, 17: 3; still wanted to serve at court). Mechthild prays for her fellow beguine, fearing that she will be made the devil’s companion in the afterlife. Why, Mechthild asks rhetorically? Not only because the lady loves her own importance at court to excess, but also because she pays too much attention to *unnütze hovzuht* (IV, 17: 7; idle courtly manners). This disapproval of courtliness might seem inconsistent in the light of statements from earlier chapters such as this one from Book I: “He [Christ] greets her [the soul] in courtly language (*hovesprache*) that one does not hear in this kitchen, clothes her in the garments that one is supposed to wear in the palace, and surrenders himself into her power.”⁷¹ Clearly, there is a difference between God’s use of *hovesprache* to express his love for the humble soul of Mechthild and the beguine sister’s use of it to express her fealty to her princely superiors and her own sense of worldly importance. More significantly, however, this situation suggests something more strategic: Mechthild places the experience of mystical union in the context of a court and uses language that bears the inflections of that context. Yet Low German is *not* the standard *hovesprache* or at least not exactly. Just as the displacement of courtliness onto the court of heaven literally removes the court from the world, so the use of Low German distances the courtly language from the secular dangers faced by Mechthild’s fellow beguine. Significantly, the effect of this linguistic situation is consistent with the text’s larger mission of universal instruction and outreach. While this

example makes clear that Mechthild disapproved of the more widespread courtly values promoted in the literary culture of the day, it also makes clear that this is a group Mechthild wants to reach. Reforming the worldly court by making it divine, Mechthild also addresses the problems of specific individuals living in her community who harbor lingering attachments to the courtly world.

Mechthild aims at more than the court, however. In a chapter titled, “How Bad Priests Shall Be Laid Low,” Mechthild addresses the priesthood as follows: “Woe, Crown of Holy Christianity, how severely have you been sullied! The jewels have dropped from you, for you weaken and dishonor the holy Christian faith.”⁷² We learn precisely who is sullying Christianity in the next paragraph: “Owe crone der heligen pfaheit, wie bistu verschwunden! Joch hastu nicht mere denne das umbeval din selbes, das ist pfaeffeliche gewalt, da mitte vihtestu uf got und sine userwelten vründe. Harumbe wil dich got nidern, e du icht wissest” (VI, 21: 10–13; Woe, Crown of the holy priesthood, how utterly have you disappeared! You have nothing left but what is wrapped around you; that is, ecclesiastical authority with which you fight against God and his chosen friends. For this God will bring you low before you know it.). As becomes clear later in the chapter, both God and Mechthild hold the Pope responsible for the corruption among priests that Mechthild witnesses and under which she suffers. Not all priests are bad, however. While these chapters suggest an aim to reform the bad priests and save all Christianity, others focus on the praise of preachers known to Mechthild through her connections with the Dominicans in Magdeburg.⁷³ This praise ranges from encouragement of a certain Dietrich whose humility makes him reluctant to accept the position of Dean in Magdeburg (VI, 2 and 3)⁷⁴ to petitions for the souls of Dominican friars she knew (see, for example, III, 17). In all of these cases, the particular (local) case is intended to instruct a broader audience. The fate of sinful souls in purgatory provides lessons for general behavior; similarly, the prayers for local individuals simultaneously carry a message for all, and they do so in the language of the hometown.

Underlying this strategy is a theological principle about the power of collective faith stated openly in Book VI. Responding to criticism that the celebrant of the mass in one of her visions was John the Baptist who was a layman and not a priest, Mechthild writes: “Das Johannes Baptista gottes wort sprach, alsus verre mag es niemer babest noch bischof noch priester vollebringen denne alleine mit únsrem unsinnelichem cristanem gelovben. Was dis ein leier Berihtent mich, ir blinden; úwer luginen und úwer has wirt úch niemer vergeben ane pine! (VI, 36: 19–23; That John the Baptist spoke God’s word—such a thing can neither pope nor bishop nor priest ever bring to pass except through our intangible Christian faith alone. Was this a layman? Prove me wrong, you blind ones; your lies and your hate shall never be forgiven you without pain!). The implication is clear: the ordination of any person, be he John the Baptist or the Pope, is made valid and effective

exclusively through the power of Christian faith as a whole, which, though a collective of humans, is more than human, or beyond human understanding (*unsinnlichem*). The source of such supernatural wonders as speaking God's word lies not in the church institutional hierarchy but rather in the church as empowered by the faith of its members. The language of Mechthild's text addresses these members directly and thereby activates their power. Moreover, it openly resists the notion that Latin and those who write it have an exclusive claim on addressing "all creatures" and preaching their salvation.⁷⁵

The right to make this claim, as Nicole Bériou puts it, was "one of the questions of the moment" in the thirteenth century.⁷⁶ While the Dominican mission explicitly advocated preaching to prevent heresy, the preaching rights of Dominicans themselves were contested by the secular clergy who did not always welcome Dominicans into their parishes.⁷⁷ The secular clergy is understood here to be those men of the church who are not in religious orders; they are generally defined in opposition to the monastic clergy or monks of the Benedictine or Cistercian orders. The secular clergy consists of ordained priests who learned to be parish priests from their predecessors or those appointed to higher offices who would have attended cathedral schools. It also refers at this time to a group of professors at the University of Paris. The distinction generally rests on whether or not the cleric is going to have contact with the laity. The secular clergy will; the men of orders (monastic clergy) will not. The appearance of the mendicant orders upset this neat distinction, however, for they were organized according to monastic principles, but they were not cloistered in monasteries. Rather they resided in towns and cities as well as traveled between them and they had many dealings with the laity. This is the source of the tensions I refer to here—they are territorial and jurisdictional. The secular clergy is threatened by the preaching in their own parishes or at the university by people who appear to be monks and who therefore theoretically belong behind the walls of a monastery and not in the public setting of churches and university lectures.⁷⁸

In the course of these debates about preaching rights, theologians argued over what constituted ordination (one had to be sent out officially to preach by an agent of the Pope) as well as what constituted preaching (teaching Christian doctrine in public). Moreover, as Alcuin Blamires has pointed out, during the thirteenth century the legends of female saints like Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria became part of the religious mainstream through Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*.⁷⁹ The popularity of these figures and the approbation with which their apostolic activities were met presented theologians with a contradiction: How could they reconcile the obviously praiseworthy preaching and public discourse of these women with the Pauline and canon prohibitions against women teaching?⁸⁰

While the answer to this dilemma was almost universally to reaffirm the prohibition against women preaching (that is, teaching in public), the debates

pointed up a number of paradoxes within orthodox doctrine which left openings for lay and women's preaching at least to a limited extent.⁸¹ For example, while scholars like Henry of Ghent, Thomas Aquinas, and Humbert of Romans generally agreed on the reasons women should not be allowed to preach—women lack authority because they are inferior to men, they are inconstant and hence easily swayed from the truth, and their presence and speech would inflame male desire, inciting them to sin—they could not deny that there were women in the Bible who had received the gift of prophecy and had therefore been able to speak publicly. Further, they saw good preachers as being blessed with a special gift from God. Finally, another scholar, Bernard of Fontcaude, cites Gregory the Great in arguing that if one has the gift and does not use it to help other people, one is committing a grave sin, although Gregory the Great was talking about priests who refrained from preaching in favor of contemplation and did not have women in mind.⁸² Humbert of Romans agreed with Gregory, stating categorically that women were not permitted to preach. Yet, as Blamires notes, "[t]he paradox implicit in Humbert's position is that a woman blessed with a gift for preaching seems liable to incur guilt by not being allowed to use it."⁸³ With recourse to the examples of Mary and Catherine, Eustace of Arras, a Franciscan, suggested in answer to this dilemma that a woman could speak authoritatively if she were gifted with prophecy and if she herself followed an exemplary and pure lifestyle.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, if the examples of Mary and Catherine provided an opening for women to claim the right to spread God's word publicly, the appearance of actual preaching women led to, according to Bériou, the increasingly firm consolidation of the office and powers of preaching in the hands of men.⁸⁵ Women involved with the Waldensian heresy popular in France in the late twelfth century, for example, were known to preach as much as their male counterparts. Indeed, the Waldensians' penchant for itinerant preaching and begging made them much more problematic for papal authorities than other groups who settled in housed communities and did not move around.⁸⁶ Pope Innocent III responded to this problem by allowing certain forms of public speech (*exhortatio*, a testimony of one's own experience, instead of *predicatio*). But by the early thirteenth century, Pope Gregory IX had decided to forbid preaching by laypeople altogether.⁸⁷ Increasingly as the century progressed, women's instructive speech (even to their children) came under more and more supervision. Of course we can never know how much of this debate Mechthild may have been aware of, but it is possible all the same to read her text, and the choice or even the effects of the choice of the vernacular as inflected by these issues. Mechthild's text clearly shows that the figures of Mary and Catherine were positive models for the authority and legitimacy of women to transmit the divine revelations made possible by the "special gift"—an intimate relationship with God.⁸⁸ Her repeated claims that the book comes from God and not *us menschlichen sinnen* (IV, 2: 134; from human

thought) can also be understood in terms of this debate. Her association with other holy women grants her the aura of purity and her denial of direct authorship points to the prophetic gift as the cause of the writings. Perhaps in this context, then, the command to write from her confessor attested to in chapter two of Book IV can be seen as much more than a generic convention.⁸⁹ As a schooled Dominican, the confessor would have been aware of the strong clerical disapproval of women teaching in public and of female speech, a consideration that would suggest a more strategic reason for the famous *Schreibbefehl* (command to write). It seems to me that given this context, the choice to put Mechthild's teachings in writing that was vernacular and literary enabled both her and her confessors to avoid the potential charge that she was preaching or teaching in a transgressive (that is, public) way.

As this evidence makes clear, the choice of the vernacular in any given region must be understood in the light of contemporary geopolitical and literary factors. In Mechthild's case, her claimed inadequate knowledge of Latin is a less significant factor than (1) her choice to live as a beguine in a city where she had few connections and (2) her alliance with the Dominicans whose mission was to teach the laity primarily through preaching in the vernacular. As a woman, Mechthild was not permitted to preach, but she could write and her book's mission to reform "all creatures" clearly found a sympathetic ear among her confessors, for they encouraged and supported her writing. The choice of vernacular in this context thus embodies a challenge to a particular faction of the secular clergy or to a style of pastoral care, a challenge made by Mechthild *and* the Dominican preachers who advise her as well as those who succeed her, such as Meister Eckhart, who, despite his position as a formally trained scholar and preacher, was criticized for trying to teach the unlearned.⁹⁰

While the tension between the new orders and the papal authorities proved to be divisive within the larger ecclesiastical organization, it was perhaps ironically a product of Christian doctrine itself. As several scholars have recently argued, the challenge just described is also a literal enactment of a central Christian belief—that is, *kenosis*, the doctrine that God chooses the humble, downtrodden and weak as his instruments, as he did in his incarnation.⁹¹ We see this doctrine laid out in a dialogue between Mechthild and God in which God reminds her that: "die vluot mines heligen geistes vlússet von nature ze tal. [. . .] Das ist mir vor inen ein gros ere und sterket die heligen cristanheit an in vil sere, das der ungelerte munt die gelerte zungen von minem heligen geiste leret" (II, 26: 29–33; the tide of my Holy Spirit flows by nature down hill. [. . .] It is a great honor for me and it very much strengthens Holy Christianity that the unlearned mouth, aided by my Holy Spirit, teaches the learned tongue). As both Susanne Köbele and Nicholas Watson note, this passage suggests a direct link between *kenosis* and the use of the vernacular.⁹² By writing down her revelations, rules, and instructions in Middle Low German, Mechthild enacts God's assertion: She, the unlearned

mouth, teaches scholars in a tongue twice removed from learning's mountaintop (the Latin clergy and courtiers), and at the same time spreads the message she bears out onto the "valley floor" of this northern realm. Mechthild's use of the vernacular in her writing thus highlights her agency on a number of levels—the choice not to dictate for translation into Latin and the venture onto the new ground of courtly mysticism—even as her role as messenger of God downplays or mitigates these acts as explicit claims on authority. It is also central to the unusual way Mechthild claims a universal audience with the language of her hometown.

Aestheticizing Dissent

Mechthild's decision to write in the vernacular, as we have seen, enables her to circumvent the ban on lay and women's teaching and to address a universal audience with a local language. These aspects of her writing often lead modern readers to ask if it constituted a radical, perhaps even heretical threat to clerical authorities. The fear of recriminations that Mechthild expresses in the book seems to support this suggestion as do the explicit critiques of the clergy and the church.⁹³ *The Flowing Light* also affirms the authority of the Dominican order, however, and advocates clerical supervision of all religious people. How are we to understand this apparent contradiction? How can Mechthild appear to be a dissenting Christian and a submissive Christian at the same time? And what does the perception of this contradiction reveal about the modern evaluation of Mechthild as an author?

In the introduction to her anthology of medieval women writers, Katharina Wilson points out that the complicity with the agents of authority (for example, the church) demonstrated by Mechthild and other women writers might have been one of the reasons certain female-authored writings failed to excite the attention of traditional literary histories. Wilson writes: "[E]ditors do not generally consider such viewpoints as orthodox Catholicism (as with Hildegard), monastic or eremitic contemplation (as with Julian), devout reflection and overt didacticism (as with Hrotsvit), and conformist religiosity (even when coupled with a plea for Church reform and chastisement of clerical corruption, as with Mechthild, Bridget, and Catherine) to appeal as much to modern tastes as the more unusual expressions of a rebellious, nonconformist spirit."⁹⁴ In short, those who go against the grain (male or female) seem to interest certain generations of critics more than others. In the current academic setting, Wilson's comments could refer to the field of English medieval studies where left-thinking scholars have found the anticlerical writings of John Wycliffe and the Lollards to be particularly worthy of attention, perhaps especially because there is evidence of explicit establishment attempts to censor these writings in the Arundel Constitutions of 1409.⁹⁵ Indeed, perhaps their own efforts to counter what might feel like the

censoring effect of establishment Chaucer studies have contributed to this interest.

These observations suggest that an important criterion for inclusion in modern literary histories has been the perception that an author is nonconformist, rebellious, even radical, all of which are code words for a very traditional category for granting literary authority: originality. At the root of this concept is an evaluation of agency that is also colored by an ideological judgment. Mechthild's writings have been perceived as conformist and therefore as less "appealing" (to use Wilson's term) by German Protestant scholars of the nineteenth century, for example, because they are not anti-Catholic enough. In contrast to Luther, then, Mechthild is perhaps seen as someone who unthinkingly or passively accepts Catholic teachings. However, as Wilson's comment suggests, feminist literary scholars have perceived Mechthild as a nonconformist for having actively chosen an unconventional beguine lifestyle and critiquing corrupt priests. In either case, the perception of her agency (either its lack or its presence) is at the root of the judgment, but this perception is colored by different ideological sympathies – on the one hand, Protestant bias against Catholics, and, on the other, feminist bias against Catholic forms of patriarchy.

The following exploration of Mechthild's relationship to the clergy seen in its historical context enables us to resist the temptation to locate Mechthild's agency according to current sympathies for the radical or antiestablishment. Indeed, as will become clear, Mechthild is both a dissenter and a defender of the church, but she is not a radical or a heretic. Indeed, heresy and dissent are distinct concepts in this context. Both heresy and dissent are oppositional categories; a dissenter needs to have something against which to dissent, a heretic needs to have a doctrine from which to stray.⁹⁶ What constitutes heresy, however, is determined by institutional ruling and is as such, much more narrowly defined. Only church authorities can condemn something or someone as heretical. Although it is true that dissenters might be deemed heretical by the church at some point, they can just as easily be leading church officials who, in the face of clerical corruption, call for a reform that consists of stricter adherence to orthodoxy. Mechthild's attacks on the priesthood fall under the latter rubric – though she is not a leader in the church, she calls for priests and preachers to return to virtue as defined by church doctrine.⁹⁷

Mechthild's agency and literary authority are therefore not to be found in a judgment of her either as a conformist or as a radical. Rather, we see her agency not only in the way her dissent and defense of the church engage in current debates about secular versus mendicant preaching authority but also in the poetics of this engagement. This exploration returns us to the significance of the text's composition in the vernacular. As I have noted, Mechthild's book is the first of its kind to be composed and written down in German. It is one of the first examples of German prose, and it is one that, intriguingly, is marked by unprecedented flights of poetry. Scholars have long remarked on the

quality of Mechthild's poetic representations of ecstatic union between the soul and God, as well as on the references and allusions she makes to a tradition of German courtly lyric.⁹⁸ However, most remarkable is the coupling of an enchanting, lyrical prose with the mission to instruct all religious people and to reform bad ones. This chapter thus concludes with a second look at the critiques of the priesthood and examines the juxtaposition between them and poetic form. What emerges from this discussion is a sense that Mechthild's aesthetic achievement takes on greater significance when understood as part of contemporary struggles over the rights and authorities of the preaching clergy. Just as the choice of the vernacular is indicative of an active and purposeful decision on the part of an agent, however contingent that decision may be, so too is the poetry of Mechthild's prose an indicator of a writing agent. Mechthild's text thus demonstrates how devotion can be an art and how even conformist dissent can be perceived by modern readers as worthy of literary acclaim.

MECHTHILD ON PRIESTS AND PREACHERS: DISSENT OR ORTHODOXY?

A newcomer to Mechthild's book today will no doubt find it difficult to read the following passage and not assume that it would have raised the ire of clerical readers:⁹⁹

Das ist lang, das ich ein vegefür sach, das was gelich eim fûrigen wasser und es sot als ein fûrig gloggespise und es was oben mit einem vinstern nebel bezogen. In dem wasser swebten vische, die waren glich menschlichen bilden. Dis waren der armen pfaffen selen, die in diser welt hatten geswebet in der girekeit aller vollust und hatten hie gebrant in der verwassenen unkûschekeit, die si also sere verblendet, das si niht guotes moegent geminnen. Uf dem wasser fuorent vischere, die hatten weder schif noch netze, mere si vischeten mit iren furigen klawen, wan si ovch geiste und tûfel waren. Als si si brahten uf das lant, so zugen si inen bitterliche die hut abe und wurft si in einen siedenden kessel alzehant; darin stiessen si si mit fûrigen gablen. Als si denne nach irem willen volgare warent, so vrassen si si in iren sneblen. So huoben sich die tûfele uf das wasser aber und taten si dur ire zegel und vischeten si und sutten si und doeweten si aber. (V, 14: 2–13)

A long time ago, I saw a certain purgatory that was like a fiery water and it boiled like fiery bell-metal and it was shrouded above by a murky fog. In the water floated fish who had human likenesses. These were the souls of the poor priests who in this world had drifted in the greed of total lust (*vollust*) and had burned here in the cursed lust (*unkûschekeit*) that so utterly blinds them that they can love nothing good. On the water, fishermen moved about who had neither ship nor net, rather they fished with their fiery claws, for they were actually spirits and devils. When they brought them onto land, they cruelly pulled off their skin and threw them quickly into a boiling kettle; then they stuck them with fiery forks. When they were well-done to their liking, they gobbled them with their beaks. Then the devils raised themselves above the water and passed them through their tails and fished them and boiled them and digested them again.

This passage is among the most explicit depictions of the fate of corrupt priests in Mechthild's book and probably also the most striking in its bold and raw imagery. Yet, the context for the passage reveals that dissent is not only a relative term and therefore difficult to define out of a particular context but also not at all uncommon among religious writers, even prominent church

authorities. Specifically, the focus on the greed and lust of priests in this vision is downright conventional. Especially after the Gregorian reforms, dissenting Christians increasingly turned their attention to the morality of both the priests and the laity. In the twelfth century, for example, Tanchelm, a monk turned wandering preacher, who was murdered by a priest in 1115, preached against the corruption of the church in the Low Countries;¹⁰⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in a sermon on the Song of Songs about the “stinking plague” spreading through the body of the church and the “whorish splendor” of its high officers.¹⁰¹ He also composed a long treatise for Pope Eugenius III, a former monk under his tutelage, about how he should maintain his spiritual well-being while attending to the evils of the secular world as Pope.¹⁰² Rupert of Deutz and Gerhoch of Reichersberg, German contemporaries of Bernard decried the fact that the summit of the ecclesiastical order was also the summit of false Christianity, the main transgression being *avaritia*.¹⁰³ Hildegard of Bingen, also a contemporary of Bernard’s, is told in the first vision of the *Scivias* to cry out and speak of her visions from God “until those people are instructed, who, though they see the inmost contents of the Scriptures, do not wish to tell them or preach them, because they are lukewarm and sluggish in serving God’s justice.”¹⁰⁴ Later in Hildegard’s book, the critiques become more pointed as God asks priests, “How do you dare to do your office and touch your Lord with bloody hands, in perverse filth and adulterous wickedness?”¹⁰⁵ Finally, Elisabeth of Schönau charges the clergy with seeking to sell the holy sacraments and with having the hearts of thieves and robbers.¹⁰⁶ Critiquing the clergy is thus not a new phenomenon in the thirteenth century when Mechthild is writing.¹⁰⁷ The imagery of bad priests as devil’s food, however surprising for a modern reader, would not constitute a threat to religious authorities. However, if we place this purgatorial vision along with Mechthild’s most explicit condemnation of priests first in the context of Mechthild’s other comments about priests and preachers and second, in the context of the volatile tensions between the secular clergy and the mendicant orders over preaching rights in the second half of the thirteenth century, we can understand Mechthild’s critiques less as dissent than as an active engagement with the power struggles connected with religious reform that were taking place around her.

Mechthild’s writings on priests and their office show a preference for those in the Dominican order over the secular clergy. In several chapters she enumerates the virtues of the order’s founder, St. Dominic, whom she “loves above all saints” (*minne[t] über alle heligen*; IV, 20: 4).¹⁰⁸ God loves the Preachers Order, too, because they honor His three names “in praiseworthy song, with sincere preaching, with correct remission (in confession), with loving consolation, with friendly aid, and with a holy example.”¹⁰⁹ In a vision of “God’s house” in heaven, Mechthild sees the preachers receiving their eternal reward and a place near the throne of heaven, their feet adorned with precious stones “because of the toil that is required in this world of their feet”

(*wider ir arbeit, die hie an ir fuesse ist geleit*)—a reference to their wandering preaching missions across Europe.¹¹⁰ Indeed, God privileges them so much that He promises Mechthild in another vision that they will survive until the end of time.¹¹¹

As is evident in a dialogue with God in Book V, this favor derives principally from the role Dominic and his preachers play as God's special agents against false Christians. The first-person narrator wonders why St. Elisabeth of Hungary was canonized after she had been buried *also unlange* (V, 34: 5; for such a short time).¹¹² God answers that [*e*]s *ist der botten reht, das si snelle sien* (V, 34: 6; it is the right of messengers to be quick). He goes on to explain that he had sent St. Elisabeth as a messenger “den unseligen wrowen, die in den búrgen sassen, mit der unkúscheit also sere durflossen und mit dem homuote also sere úberzogen und mit der italkeit also stete umbevangen, das si nach rehte in das abgrúnde solten sin gegangen” (V, 34: 7–10; to the unholy women sitting in castles so permeated with lust, so covered in arrogance, and so ensconced in vanity that they rightly should have gone into the abyss). Other messengers deserving quick canonization are, of course, St. Dominic, a messenger sent to the unbelieving, to teach the foolish, and to console the troubled; St. Francis, a messenger to the greedy priesthood and the arrogant laity; and, St. Peter, a recent martyr—a Dominican working against the Cathar heresy in Lombardy and Tuscany who was murdered in 1252 and canonized in 1253—a messenger of blood to false Christianity.¹¹³

This dialogue highlights Mechthild's positioning of herself and her book within a contemporary mendicant mission ordained by God against false Christians among both the clergy and the laity. Later in the same dialogue, claiming sainthood not for Mechthild, but for her book, God places it in the same category as Saints Elisabeth, Dominic, Francis, and Peter—that is, He sends the *book* “as a messenger to all religious people, both the evil and the good.”¹¹⁴ The dialogue also suggests that what is couched as praise nevertheless often carries implied critiques. St. Francis is a messenger to the *greedy* priesthood, for example. The vision of the Dominicans' reward in heaven also includes a lament against them: “O ir predier, wie regent ir úwer zungen nu so ungerne und neigent úweri oren so noete vor des sunders munt!” (III, 1: 92–93; Oh preachers, how reluctantly you now move your tongues and bend your ears only out of necessity before the sinner's mouth!). St. Dominic's virtues are not only listed but should, according to Mechthild's book, be possessed and practiced by all priors, which clearly implies that they are not.¹¹⁵ Similarly, in another chapter, Mechthild writes: “Sant Dominicus der merkte sine brueder mit getrúwer andaht, mit lieplicher angesiht, mit heliger wisheit, und nit mit vare, nit mit verkerten sinnen und nit mit grúwelicher gegenwúrtikeit” (V, 24: 43–45; St. Dominic looked out for his brothers with true devotion, with a loving countenance and with holy wisdom, not with evil intentions, and not with perverted notions, and not in a gruesome or cruel manner). St. Dominic is explicitly held up as an ideal for the

Dominican order because, as Marianne Heimbach has noted, only a generation after the death of the saint, the “cruel” preachers with “evil intentions” and “perverted notions” (particularly those in leadership positions) are clearly failing to live up to this ideal.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Mechthild’s laments on behalf of preachers gone bad are milder and more forgiving than her diatribes against the *secular* clergy. She sees numerous preachers in purgatory, but her prayers generally get them out. Only the secular clergy become devil’s food (V, 14).¹¹⁷

As vivid and perhaps surprising as this understanding of purgatory may be to modern readers, the depiction of the devil or his agents as *sündenfresse*. (III, 15; 53; sin-eaters) is not a Mechthildian innovation to the tradition.¹¹⁸ Indeed, neither Mechthild’s choice to critique the priesthood nor her depictions of sinners in purgatory or hell are unconventional.¹¹⁹ As Katharina Bochsler has noted, this understanding of the fate of sinners in hell was already part of the popular imagination in the twelfth century.¹²⁰ For evidence of this popularity, we may consider one of the legends of the hell-vision tradition which had a wide circulation in Germany. The legend of Tundale and his journey to the beyond was transmitted in two German versions dating from the late twelfth century. On that journey, Tundale and the angel accompanying him encounter a monster that sits on a frozen sea devouring sinners who then pass through him to be “born again” from under his tail as monsters themselves.¹²¹ Moreover, the motif of the devil’s kitchen evoked by the skinned priests being cooked and eaten was also prevalent, and not only in visionary literature.¹²²

The reason for the terrible fate of wicked priests in purgatory is laid bare in chapter twenty one of book IV, part of which I referred to earlier in this chapter. To convey a sense of the power of Mechthild’s invective, I quote the entire chapter here (VI, 21):

Wie boesú pfafheit sol genidert werden [, wie predier alleine predien soent und bischoeve sin] und von den jungesten bruodern.

Owe crone der heligen cristanheit, wie sere bistu geselwet! Din edelsteine sint dir entvallen, wan du krenkest und schendest den heligen cristanen gelovben; din golt das ist verfúlet in dem pfuole der unkúscheit, wan du bist verarmet und hast der waren minne nit; din kúscheit ist verbrant in dem girigen fúre des frasses; din diemuot ist versunken in dem sumpfe dines vleisches; din warheit ist ze nihte worden in der lúgine dirre welte; din blumen aller tugenden sint dir abgefallen.

Owe crone der heligen pfafheit, wie bistu verwunden! Joch hastu nicht mere denne das umbeval din selbes, das ist pfaeffeliche gewalt, da mitte vihtestu uf got und sine userwelten vrúnde. Harumbe wil dich got nidern, e du icht wissest, wan únser herre sprichet alsus: “Ich wil dem babest von Rome sin herze rueren mit grossem jamere, und in dem jamere wil ich ime zuosprechen und im klagen, das minú schafhirten von Jerusalem mordere und wolve sint worden, wande si vor minen ovgen die wissen lamber mordent, und die alten schaf dú sint allú hovbtsicch, wan sú moegent nit essen die gesunden weide, die da wahset an den hohen bergen, das ist goetlichú liebi und heligú lere.

“Swer den helleweg nit weis, der sehe an die verboesete pfafheit, wie rehte ir leben zuo der helle gat mit wiben und mit kinden und mit andern offenbaren sünden. So ist des not, das die jungesten bruoder kommen; wan swenne der mantel ist alt, so ist er ovch kalt. So mues ich miner brut, der heligen cristanheit, einen núwen mantel geben.” Das soellent die jungesten bruoder wesen, als da vor ist geschriben.

“Sun babest, dis soltu vollebringen, so mahtu din leben lengen; das nu din vorvaren also unlange

lebent, das kumt da von, das si mines heimlichen willen nit vollebringent." Alsus sach ich den babest an sinem gebette, und do horte ich, das im got kundete dise rede.

How the evil clergy shall be laid low [, how preachers alone should preach and be bishops] and concerning the last brothers.

Alas, crown of holy Christianity, how severely have you been sullied! Your precious stones have fallen from you, for you weaken and dishonor the holy Christian faith; your gold is fouled in the foul mire of lust, for you are impoverished and do not have true love; your chastity is burned in the greedy fire of gluttony; your humility is sunken in the swamp of your flesh; your truth has been destroyed in the lies of this world; your flowers of all the virtues have fallen away from you.

Alas, crown of the holy priesthood, how utterly have you disappeared! You have nothing left but what is wrapped around you; that is, ecclesiastical authority with which you fight against God and his chosen friends. For this God will bring you low before you know it, for our lord speaks thus: "I intend to touch the heart of the Pope in Rome with great sorrow, and in this sorrow I will tell him and complain to him that my shepherds from Jerusalem have become murderers and wolves, for before my eyes they murder the white lambs, and the old sheep are all sick in the head, for they cannot eat the healthy grasses that grow on the high mountains; that is divine love and holy teachings.

"Whoever does not know of the path to hell, let him see in the corrupted priesthood how directly their lives go to hell with women and children and with other public sins. This is why it is necessary that the last brothers come; for when the cloak is old, it is also cold. Thus I must give my bride, holy Christianity, a new cloak." That shall be the last brothers, as is written above.

"Son Pope, this shall you bring to pass and so may you live the long life that your predecessors lived only briefly. That is because they would not carry out my secret will." Just so did I see the Pope at his prayers and then I heard that God made this message/speech known to him.

These strident comments, which conclude with a veiled threat to the life of the current Pope, are illuminated by the context of the larger struggle over jurisdiction going on in the mid-thirteenth century between the secular clergy and the mendicant orders.¹²³ David d'Avray has shown that the deplorable state of the priesthood in the decades leading up to the founding of the mendicant orders was widely known.¹²⁴ Precisely for this reason, the Dominican Order in particular placed special emphasis, first, on proper and thorough theological education of the friars, preferably at the University of Paris, and, second, on the *vita apostolica*. As such, in 1221, Pope Honorius III wrote in a letter to all the prelates of the Christian realm that the preaching friars were authorized not only to preach, but also to hear confession, since the latter was seen as an additional means for correction and instruction.¹²⁵ In the early days of the order, the well-educated preachers were welcomed by the frequently quite poorly educated parish priests who gladly invited them to preach and instruct in their churches. Conflict arose in mid-century, however, when parishioners began to divert monies for burial plots, petitions for reading masses, and other offerings to the friaries and away from their local priests.¹²⁶ Once their income was affected, the parish priests became, perhaps understandably, less welcoming toward their Dominican brothers. Clearly, Mechthild was not so understanding, as her focus on the avarice of priests suggests. Nor was she alone, for the conflict continued, fueled by a series of papal bulls that alternately expanded or revoked the privileges of the mendicant preachers over a period of fifty years.¹²⁷

Mechthild was most likely writing her critiques on priests and preachers at the height of this conflict—between the late 1250s and 1270.¹²⁸ In the 1250s

especially, she had reason to be dismayed at the secular clergy and defend the preachers, for in the early part of the decade, William of St. Amour, a professor at the University of Paris, had claimed in a number of treatises and sermons, first, that the mendicants were essentially monks and should behave like monks, which meant that they should not be allowed access to university study nor should they be allowed to preach in public, and, second, that only the Apostles and their descendants (that is, the ordained priests of the secular clergy) should be allowed to preach God's word.¹²⁹ When Mechthild writes that *Der predier orden wart sere angevohten von valschen meistern, dar zuo von manigem girigem sunder* (IV, 27: 3–4; the preachers' order had been under severe attack by false teachers and in addition by many greedy sinners), she is referring to the furor that arose around William's treatise.¹³⁰ William's ideas found papal approval in 1254 in a bull issued by Innocent IV, which nevertheless was annulled shortly thereafter in 1255 by Innocent's successor, Alexander IV. In 1256, William's treatise was rejected as false teaching.¹³¹ Perhaps Alexander did get the message that Mechthild saw for him in the vision, for, in the controversy and tensions that ensued over the next fifty years, the friars had the papacy consistently on their side. For this reason, when Mechthild predicts the coming of a new order modeled on the ideal Dominicans (the "last brothers" mentioned in VI, 21), she notes that *War si koment, da ist inen predien, bihte hoeren und messe singen und lesen unverbotten* (IV, 27: 68–69; wherever they go, preaching, hearing confession, and singing and reading mass are not forbidden). Mechthild's fear of recriminations against her and her book is thus not the result of a complete break with church authority. Rather, it must be seen as a response to, indeed, a critical engagement with the volatile antagonisms existing among the various religious factions active in her area.

Given this context, Mechthild's lament against the priesthood is not quite as starkly challenging as it might at first have seemed. She sides with the Dominicans, the order in charge of her spiritual care, the order sent as a messenger of God on a mission to correct and reform the corruption of false Christians, a mission for which her book also acts as a saintly messenger, and a mission that had relatively consistent backing from the papacy after 1256. Further, she has the ultimate authority behind her, as we see in the condemnation of the evil priesthood when the voice of God calls for the help of the Pope in unmasking the corrupt preachers who are depriving the people of their spiritual nourishment (VI, 21: 13–19). While the critique in this chapter is far-reaching, lamenting the fall of the clergy in general—"crown of Holy Christianity" and its leadership—"crown of the holy priesthood"—it does not question priestly authority as it is attached to particular offices. Rather, the concern is, in Marianne Heimbach's terms, with "reestablishing the personal integrity of the clergy through an internal reform that would reconcile everyday life, the clerical mission, and the authority of the office of priest."¹³² Mechthild's critiques of corrupt priests thus reveal her to be

engaged in a contemporary debate about the role of mendicant friars in pastoral care. Her contributions to this debate, though perhaps controversial for the parish priests and university-trained scholars in Magdeburg, conform to the opinions of her Dominican supervisors whose position in the debate is favored by the highest church authority, the Pope.

There is also evidence in the text that Mechthild's readers understood her critiques precisely within the context of this debate. The heading of this chapter—"Wie boesú pfafheit sol genidert werden[, wie predier alleine predien soent und bischoeve sin] und von den jungesten bruodern"—indicates that there were at least some Dominicans ready to accept Mechthild's critiques as support for their position against the secular clergy. Neumann calls the bracketed section *unecht* (inauthentic), claiming that it was inserted either by an editor or a later copyist.¹³³ If this is indeed the case, the medieval publishers of the text were already reading this chapter as taking a position in the debate, for the addition to the heading signals that the subject of the chapter is not only the corrupted priesthood but also that "only preachers should preach and be bishops." As an assertion of Dominican pastoral and preaching rights, one can hardly be more clear.

In her own milieu, then, Mechthild is on the vanguard of new innovations in forms of religious life and pastoral care emerging in Dominican and beguine communities and in their relations with each other. Yet in taking sides with the Dominicans against the secular clergy, Mechthild can both invoke a long tradition of dissenting Christians and, at the same time, align herself with the ultimate religious authority on earth, the papacy. She is after all questioning not clerical authority but the morality of the corrupt who have authority. The pairing of dissent with orthodoxy is thus not oppositional in this context. Mechthild's dissent is in fact a defense of orthodoxy in the face of a debased secular clergy that ignores it.

THE ART OF MECHTHILD'S CRITICAL DEVOTION

This discussion points up the pitfalls of evaluating a writer as important or noteworthy because of an unreflected notion of radicality or originality. Mechthild's positioning of herself within the debates among the clergy in her milieu highlights the contingency of terms like *dissent* and *heresy*, *conformist* and *radical*, *conventional* and *new* that are suggested by the broader notions of originality applied by some modern criticism. Mechthild's conformity is willing toward Dominican authority but defiant toward secular authority. As such, conformity cannot be used as an automatic indicator of orthodoxy, nor does adherence to orthodoxy always indicate lack of originality or agency. In the case of *The Flowing Light*, Mechthild's so-called defiant conformity can be seen not only on this conceptual level but also on the level of form. Looking at the formal elements of the passages about preachers and priests

cited above and considering their aesthetic effect in the light of the context I have laid out, posits Mechthild as an active composer of these writings in the way she articulates her views on the clergy with a new style of rhyming German prose.

When broaching the subject of Mechthild's poetics, the questions or doubts about the text's relationship to its historical author become all the more pressing. How can we, one might argue, proclaim Mechthild's poetic skill in German (in this case, Middle Low German) when the text as received is not only edited but also translated into a different, albeit related dialect (Middle High German)? No one in the scholarship disputes the artistry of these writings. But the question remains as to who is responsible for this artistry. I argue that although Mechthild of Magdeburg is not the only maker of the book as we have received it, she is nevertheless the primary one. There are several reasons to hold this opinion: (1) It was not unheard of for Low German texts to be translated into or written in High German and their rhymes preserved, as the examples of Heinrich of Veldeke, Eilhart of Oberge, and Brun of Schonebeck, discussed above, suggest. No one doubts the responsibility of these authors for the artistry of their texts, even taking into account the possibility of influence (or corruption) from a translator or scribe. (2) Heinrich of Nördlingen reports that it took two years to translate *The Flowing Light* for the friends of God in Medingen and Basel.¹³⁴ Clearly this was a work undertaken with great care. Because Heinrich praises the aesthetic quality of the writing as the most beautiful and moving German he has ever seen, it seems arguable that he would have spent this time in order to preserve this beauty as much as possible in the translation.¹³⁵ (3) Heinrich was not a Dominican but rather a member of the secular clergy; yet, unlike the Dominicans at Halle who translated the book into Latin fifty years earlier,¹³⁶ he did not remove or soften positions taken in the book with regard to the corrupt among his class. Although Mechthild's book did not bear the same absolute authority as Scripture, it is presented in the prologue as a book made by God, and Heinrich's letter to Margaret Ebner declares openly that God is present in Mechthild's book. Since, as Jeanette Beer points out, scriptural authority generally compelled lexical equivalence, it seems safe to assume that Heinrich, believing the text was inspired/authored by the Holy Spirit, did not make significant changes.¹³⁷ Finally, just as it was easier to translate one Romance vernacular into another, a translation from one German dialect into another would also involve "fewer changes than transfer from [or into] the more synthetic Latin."¹³⁸ In the absence of evidence suggesting that Heinrich drastically rewrote (or wrote, for that matter) *The Flowing Light* himself, we are therefore justified in naming Mechthild as primarily responsible for the poetic qualities that make her book so singular.

Taking a second look, then, at the passages I have cited in which Mechthild critiques the clergy, we find that the song of praise for the Dominicans (IV, 21: 8–10) attributed to God's voice is made more emphatic

through the use of internal rhyme—the preachers, God says, honor Him:

an lobelichem sange,
mit warer predeunge,
mit rehter losunge,
mit minnenklicher troestunge,
mit früntlicher helfe,
mit heligem bilde.¹³⁹

The rhythm of the list is provided by the repeated parallel structures consisting of adjective-noun phrases. All of the nouns have weak endings (that is, they end in unstressed syllables). Further, there is a symmetry to the gender of the nouns, the first noun is masculine, the last neuter, making the endings for those two adjective-noun pairs the same, whereas the middle four are feminine, making their endings the same as well. Finally, we have the three nouns in the middle of the list that rhyme: *predeunge*, *losunge*, und *troestunge*. Aesthetic form converges with the context of the mendicant debate just discussed in the three rhyming nouns, which are directly related to the Dominican pastoral mission—preaching, confession, and consolation—precisely those elements of mendicant practice with which the Parisian secular professors took issue. The symmetry, the rhyme, and the meter of the sentence all promote the Dominicans’ strengths, which are then framed by the phrases that suggest how the readers should respond to these strengths—that is, readers should praise the Dominicans and follow their good example.

In Mechthild’s lengthy vision of heaven (III, I), her praise of the Dominicans also displays poetic elements:

Ir fuesse sint gezieret mit manigerleie túrem gesteine also schone,
das ich mich werlich vroewete, wurde mir so erlich ein crone.
Das haben si wider ir arbeit,
die hie an ir fuesse ist geleit (III, I: 89–92).

Their feet are so beautifully adorned with many kinds of precious stones [that are] so beautiful that I would be truly filled with joy to receive a crown of such honor. This they have because of the toil that is demanded in this world of their feet.

The first line of this passage is characteristic of an enchanting prose style that is accented by rhymes, in this case *schone/crone*. The next line offers a rhyming couplet in the four beat line that is standard to narrative poems (both religious and secular) of the period (each stressed syllable is italicized): *Das haben si wider ir arbeit.*, die *hie* an ir fuesse *ist geleit*. These lines are taken from a long chapter describing a vision of the nine choirs of heaven in which the Dominicans find a place of honor. The rhyme here contributes to the overall sacredness and wonder of the vision—heaven has to be beautiful—and engages the reader on the level of reading pleasure. This type of rhyming—internal rhymes within prose sentences (known as *assonance* or *colon rhyme*)

and the intermittent insertion of rhyming couplets—punctuates the entire vision and has a cumulative effect. It is not surprising then that the instructions for reading the book, mentioned in the prologue, suggest reading it through from beginning to end nine times. The more one reads, the greater the poetic (and, presumably, contemplative) effect.

While the rhyme in these two passages praising the Dominicans underscores and reinforces formally what the words signify in terms of content, there are also passages in which the potential for aesthetic delight caused by the rhyme seems to contrast sharply with the grim message of the critique. We see this in the chapter that focuses on the wretched state of Christianity and then names those who have been sent to help clean it up. St. Elizabeth of Hungary is sent to the

unseligen vrowen, die in den búrgen sassen,
mit der unkúscheit also sere *durfflossen*
und mit dem homuote also sere *überzogen*
und mit der italkeit also stete *umbevungen*,
das si nach rehte in das abgrúnde solten sin *gegangen*.” (Rhymes italicized) (V, 34: 7–10).¹⁴⁰

The rhyme here strikes an unsettling chord—why would Mechthild ornament a statement describing the ladies of the castle so fully dripping, covered, and surrounded in deadly sins that they deserve to be sent into the gaping abyss? Perhaps the lyrical quality of the sentence suggested by the rhyme alludes to the apparent or surface prettiness of courtly life—one thinks here of the “unnútze hovzuht” (idle courtly manners) for which Mechthild chastises a fellow beguine earlier in the book (IV, 17: 7)—when beneath it lie serious sins bearing ugly consequences. Perhaps it merely helps to draw attention to the fate of these women as a warning to the readers. Whatever the case, the rhyme makes their sins more striking and compelling, potentially mobilizing sentiment against them.

Finally, let us return to the vision of bad priests in purgatory (V, 14). The vivid description of priests repeatedly cooked and consumed by demons is certainly remarkable. But, as I have argued, the notion that devils consumed sinful souls in the afterlife was common. Mechthild may have been influenced here by the vision of St. Paul, in which gluttonous and lecherous priests had their entrails pierced by the “keepers of hell” with “an iron with three hooks” while they were standing in a river of fire.¹⁴¹ Mechthild is firmly entrenched in the tradition arising out of the legend of Paul’s visions. Tundale’s vision, also owing much to that of St. Paul, describes the consuming devilish creature’s physical characteristics in detail, from its iron beak and claws to the fact that it eats souls and “gives birth” to them again on the ice. Mechthild’s vision also reveals compelling details: she shows us the devils not just fishing, cooking, eating and excreting the poor priests, but also the particulars of the cooking process. The priests are skinned before they are cooked; while they

are cooking they are poked with fiery forks to test for doneness;¹⁴² and they are not eaten until they are *volgare* (well-done). Using such bodily images to convey suffering is not unusual for hell visions aimed at admonishing the living.¹⁴³ Mechthild's attention to the detail of these sufferings, describing not merely the suffering of souls in hellish fire but the process by which the soul's skins are removed and the meat on their bones cooked, is a particularly striking example of this convention.

More unusual in Mechthild's vision of purgatory is its presentation in a decidedly poetic form. To illustrate the poetic accents of the writing here, I have rewritten the last lines of the chapter according to the internal rhyming and have suggested a rhyme scheme on the right-hand side. The meter here is not regular enough to suggest a particular form of poem—we are still dealing with prose—but this format gives us a better understanding of how this prose is so suggestive of poetry.

Als si si brahten uf das lant, (a)
so zugen si inen bitterliche die hut abe (b)
und wurfent si in einen siedenden kessel alzehant; (a)
darin stiessen si si mit fúrigen gablen. (b)

Als si denne nach irem willen volgare warent, (c)

so vrassen si si in iren sneblen. (d [b?])
So huoben sich die túfele uf das wasser aber (e)
und taten si dur ire zegel (d)
und vischeten si und sutten si und doeweten si aber. (V, 14: 9–13) (e)

When they brought them onto land, they cruelly pulled off their skin and threw them quickly into a boiling kettle; then they stuck them with fiery forks. When they were well-done to their liking, they gobbled them with their beaks. Then the devils raised themselves above the water and passed them through their tails and fished them and boiled them and digested them again.

Instead of couplets, we have a stanzaic structure, with two stanzas separated by an independent line. The striking detail provided by this lone line, that the devils wait until the boiled souls are cooked through, draws our attention formally as well in that it separates the two stanzas, literally standing out between them. The two stanzas are then linked again formally through the suggestion of rhyme between *gablen* (the last rhyme of the first stanza) and *sneblen* (the first rhyme of the second), which have different vowels, but the same endings. That the rhyme not only contrasts the grim subject matter but also underscores it is suggested by the final rhyme that I have labeled *e*. It is the same word and in both cases means “again,” reinforcing the idea that this terrible fate happens repeatedly and perhaps forever. The repetition of the same word also acts like an echo (and chances are this would be read aloud either privately or to a group), tonally suggesting the repeated and inevitable quality of the punishment.

In making sense of these grave and beautiful condemnations of the priesthood, we must, as we have seen, understand them in relation to the debates and tensions surrounding the rise of the mendicant orders and their new forms of religious life in the thirteenth century. Remembering, though, that the act of critiquing the priesthood is nothing new, we must acknowledge that the way Mechthild does it certainly is. Mechthild's art of devotion thus manifests itself (not exclusively but significantly) in the aestheticization of critique, a poetic positioning that offers us that "partial glimpse" of Mechthild's agency.¹⁴⁴ As such, the writings reveal to us a medieval writer engaging with debates about authority within the institutions in which she participates as a beguine woman. For this reason, we can see them as both conventional and defiant at the same time. Mechthild's text also reveals her literary agency independent of political or ideological positions (either on her part or on ours), for she makes her disdain of the priesthood into something poetic, a remarkable and unprecedented work of German prose, and so, we might say, an act of literature.

Conclusion

Mechthild works on her remarkable book in the new spiritual age of vernacular theology that begins in the thirteenth century, and it reveals her to be intimately involved with the developments and debates surrounding the rise of the mendicant orders and the semireligious women in their care. In this chapter I have tried to explore in detail the place of Mechthild's book in this context as well as what this exploration can tell us about Mechthild's authorship. While it is true that the text as received is removed from Mechthild's lifetime by translation and textual transmission, an investigation of the writings in the context of thirteenth-century language politics (both religious and secular), the Dominican mission for pastoral care, and debates about women's preaching reveals evidence of Mechthild's activity as the earthly author of *The Flowing Light*. This evidence revolves around the fact that the book was composed and written down in the vernacular. Indeed, the move to write in Middle Low German reflects Mechthild's agency in the form of a series of choices: the choice to become a beguine instead of entering a convent, the choice not to dictate to a Latinate scribe, the choice to invoke courtly motifs in portraying divine love, the choice to advocate the Dominican mission, and the choice to adopt the universal voice of that mission in the language of the hometown.

An exploration of Mechthild's attitudes toward the different levels of authority in the church (her Dominican confessors, local parish priests, bishops, and the Pope) also reveals evidence of Mechthild's involvement both in contemporary debates about the mendicant style of pastoral care and in the composition of her book. While this relationship initially seems antagonistic,

Mechthild's critiques of preachers and priests supply us less with evidence of heretical leanings than with a kind of defiant conformity that forces us as modern readers to historicize our notions of orthodoxy and dissent. Mechthild critiques evil and sinful priests, but she does so indirectly, by describing her visions of their grotesque punishments in purgatory. She shores up the authority of the Pope by calling him to account for priestly corruption. Similarly, she supports the preaching rights of the Dominicans even while attempting to shame their leadership into cleaning up their own ranks. This engagement with the struggles for jurisdiction and authority among the different factions of clergy in Magdeburg bring Mechthild's agency as an author into view. Even more revealing, however, is the poetic use Mechthild makes of the "unlearned" language she chooses for her book of mystical instruction. As we have seen, Mechthild reinforces her endorsement not only of the Dominicans but also of their pastoral program with poetry; the preacher's primary duties—preaching, confession, and consolation—are framed on either side by like-sounding noun pairs that are linked by their gender and rhyme. Mechthild depicts the sin of unholy courtly ladies in the castle with her distinctive rhyming prose, thereby drawing the reader or listener's attention to the lesson. Similarly, the end of her vision of the priests in purgatory uses a stanzaic structure and rhyme scheme to increase the force of the message. Bad ladies and priests will be punished in serious and grotesque ways that will reverberate throughout eternity even as a lyric song might echo through an abyssal canyon.

As Frank Tobin has noted, "being pedagogically savvy, [Mechthild] knows that often the best way to teach is to entertain."¹⁴⁵ In adhering to this principle, then, Mechthild creates a new kind of literature particularly well-suited to the devotional contemplation of her day. Filled with striking imagery, alluding to the lyricism of courtly literature, adopting the dialogic form of devotional practice (Song of Songs, Psalms, divine offices, responsories), and boldly claiming a universal voice, Mechthild's German book offers the devout reader (both lay and religious) new ways to worship and approach the divine through words. Attending to the context of Mechthild's choices and the spiritual age in which she lived gives us a more historically grounded understanding of Mechthild's agency and authorship, even as it forces us to be more precise about the conceptual categories (like originality, dissent, and heresy) with which we as critics imagine, construct, and evaluate such authorship.

Visions of Authorship: Cloaking the Body in Text

. . . Dar nach tet der selbe priester die stillen messe, der gewihet wart in siner muoter libe mit dem heligen geiste. Do er die wissen ovelaten nam in sine hende, do huop sich das selbe lamp uf, das uf dem alter stuont, und voegete sich mit den worten under die zeichen siner hant in die ovelaten und die ovelaten in das lamp, also das ich der ovelaten nût me sach, mere ein blutig lamp, gehangen an einem roten crúze. Mit also suessen ovgen sach es úns an, das ich es niemer me vergessen kan. [. . .] Do gieng die arme dirne zuo dem altar mit grosser liebe und mit einer offenen sele. Do nam Sant Johannes das wisse lamp mit sinen roten wunden und leit es in den kovwen irs mundes. Do leite sich das reine lamp uf sin eigen bilde in irem stal und sovg ir herze mit sinem suessen munde. Ie me es sovg, ie me si es im gonde. (II, 4: 87–93, 97–101)

After that the same priest [John the Baptist] conducted the common mass, who had been ordained in his mother's womb by the Holy Spirit. When he took the white wafer in his hands, then that same lamb that was standing on the altar got up and changed at the words and under the sign of his hands into the wafer and the wafer into the lamb so that I no longer saw the wafer, but rather a bleeding lamb hanging on a red cross. It looked upon us with such sweet eyes that I shall never be able to forget it. [. . .] Then the poor maid went to the altar with great love and with an open soul. Then Saint John took the white lamb with its red wounds and laid it in the jaws of her mouth. Then the pure lamb laid itself on its own image in her stall and suckled on her heart with its sweet mouth. The more it suckled, the more she gave it.

This passage marks the culmination of an extraordinary vision of a mass performed for a poor girl or maid (*die arme dirne*) who was not well enough

to go to church in person. During the course of the vision, the weak and *übel gekleidet* (wretchedly dressed) maid is recast as a beautiful, noble, and angelic maiden wearing a cloak and a garland, each adorned with lyrics from other chapters of *The Flowing Light*. This fascinating and self-reflexive image of female authorship points to the centrality of the concept to Mechthild's book. Indeed, Elizabeth Andersen has argued most recently that Mechthild's authorship as thematized in the writings is one of the major factors serving to unify them as an integral work.¹ Taking a different theoretical approach, Christiane Nisters (following Ursula Peters and Michel Foucault) sees "Mechthild" purely as a literary construct that carries out a particular "author-function" for the text: The representation of the reluctant, humble, and suffering *Autorinnenkörper* (author-body) is, according to Nisters, the central mechanism by which the constructed author is legitimized as holy and her book as true.² In another recent essay, Marcus Beling explores the link between authorship and body that is worked out in a process of *Selbstvergewisserung* (self-assuring self assertion) in the dialogues between body and soul and resolved in the mystical union with God. Rather than view this process as an overarching structure of the text, however, Beling claims that it is *erzählter Inhalt* (the narrated content): "Er ist das Problem, das den Text hervorbringt und darin selbst geschrieben wird" (It is the problem that produces the text and within which the text itself is written).³ This chapter takes as its starting point the convergence of body and authorship highlighted in this recent work. Taking the maid's transformation in the vision of the mass as a focal point, the chapter argues, first, that the problem of mystical authority paradoxically leads to an assertion of female authorship, and, second, that Mechthild's engagement with this problem necessarily implicates the cultural meanings of the female body circulating at this time.

As a number of scholars have recently shown, the problem of authority is a vexing one for medieval mystics.⁴ Often commanded by God to write or to speak out publicly in some way, the mystics saw themselves, at the very least, as conveyors of divine teachings, if not as teachers in their own right. The scriptural proscription against women teaching and speaking, however, made writing a more dangerous enterprise for women.⁵ This was especially true for Mechthild because she was not only a woman but also a beguine. As such, Mechthild was one among many women seeking a religious life whose very presence and whose reluctance or inability to enter orders was seen as potentially flouting clerical authority.⁶ The burden of the spiritual care and supervision of beguines added to the sometimes negative response to this presence.⁷ Despite these anxieties, however, Mechthild's Dominican confessor encouraged her to write down her revelations. Considering this contradictory situation, the relentless thematization of the problem of authorship and authority in her text is hardly surprising.⁸

In the vision of the mass, Mechthild's negotiation of the problem of authority proves to be closely linked with the problem of the female body.

Because the discovery of and interaction with God in the soul happens in the body, the body becomes the site where the drama of the mystical relationship must take place.⁹ Conveying the truth of these experiences to others means that Mechthild must claim authority for a body that she would rather escape. But, as we shall see, the problem of female authority paradoxically both inhibits and enables the claims on authority made in the text. That is, attempts to avoid making authoritative claims produce strategies that make authoritative claims. In the same way, attempts to disguise or overcome the problem of the female body lead to a reclaiming of the body. In the vision, the cloak bearing the signs of Mechthild's authorship conceals the body that was previously represented in the vision as weak and unworthy, but the vision does not reject or punish that body. Rather, the glorification of authorship represented by the cloak comes as a reward for the poor maid's good intentions. Mechthild's desire to attend mass outweighs her weak or polluted physical state. The moment of union described in the epigraph to this chapter, so redolent with bodily imagery, thus illustrates the continued importance of the body to the experience of divine love as well as the close link between the body and writing. The maid in the vision sees and feels the lamb standing in her soul, just as the lyric on the cloak declares.¹⁰

In exploring the multilayered significance of this imagery, my aim is to extend Nisters's focus on legitimization strategies and Beling's on the production of self (assurance/assertion) in and through writing into a broader historical and discursive network. This chapter thus contextualizes Mechthild's vision in contemporary religious iconography and liturgical practice. Read in this way, the vision of the mass offers us much more than a composite literary construction of an author-body; indeed, it documents a complex and sophisticated response to the problems of authority and of the female body that surface when a woman mystic writes in the thirteenth century.¹¹

The act of writing a text sent from God is always already a problem for the male or female mystic. The authority to write and the words written are said to come from God, but the act of writing them and of claiming their divine source represents a challenge to the clergy's role as mediators of God's word. For women, the risk of writing was higher; in writing, they broke the Pauline rule consigning them to silence.¹² However, as Amy Hollywood explains, visions from God were precisely what clerics looked for in judging the legitimacy of women mystics: "Without such legitimization," Hollywood argues, "(and even with it), women were subject to suspicion and condemnation. They had no basis on which they could write or teach, nor any 'text' that they might legitimately read and interpret."¹³ The visions gave the male supervisors something on which to base their judgments of the women's sanctity. These judgments could be particularly complex when we consider the competing discourses of misogyny on the one hand and Christian ideal of

kenosis on the other. Because women were considered to be inferior beings, they were thought to be more vulnerable to sexual and demonic pollution.¹⁴ However, their inferiority also made their virtues more remarkable and their unworthiness paradoxically made them more likely candidates for divine grace.¹⁵ Female mystical authorship not only threatened clerical jurisdiction over the sacred, it also presented intellectual challenges to clerics in terms of requiring them to make difficult judgments about authority and service. While Mechthild's writings suggest that she felt vulnerable to criticism based on these challenges, neither she nor her book was ever officially accused of or condemned for heresy.¹⁶ The atmosphere of fractured or factional authority in her region may account for this. In thirteenth-century Magdeburg, located near the eastern border of the Holy Roman Empire marked by the Elbe River, contact with non-Christian cultures would have weakened clerical authority. Although the mendicant orders in this region were heavily involved in the expansion of Christian authority through missionizing, their presence was also indicative of conflicting approaches to monastic life and would thus have also contributed to an atmosphere of fractured authority that might have proved more tolerant of a charismatic holy woman.¹⁷

Despite Paul's rule against women teaching and despite Mechthild's position outside the cloistered setting in which teaching might be condoned, her confessor commands her to write down her visions and revelations. Moreover, the author of the prologue expressly declares that the result is a book of instruction meant to be read repeatedly: "Alle die dis buoch wellen vernemen, die soellent es ze nún malen lesen" (Prologue, 5–6; All who wish to understand this book should read it nine times). Accordingly, Mechthild's vision of the mass is framed as a lesson: "Wie nütze das si, das ein mensche von guotem willen sie, nochdenne das si der werke nit vermag, das wisete unser lieber herre einer armen dirnen, do si nit zuo der messe komen mohte, alleine si doch leider zuo sinem dienste nit endohte. Do sprach si alsust ze gotte: 'Eya lieber herre min, sol ich hütte ane messe sin?'" (II, 4: 4–8; How useful it is that a person be of good will even though she is not capable of works—our dear Lord showed this to a poor maid when she could not come to mass for the sole reason that she unfortunately was not fit for His service. Then she spoke thus to God: "Ah my dear lord, shall I go without mass today?") The narrator provides the didactic context within which the vision is to be understood, namely that good will, or the *desire* to perform good works (as opposed to doing them), is "useful" to the religious person, for it will be rewarded by God.

The authoritative move implicit in the didactic frame perhaps explains why Mechthild writes as a third-person narrator, describing the vision being granted to a poor girl and not to a "me." This "ambiguity over voice and the source of voice" signals the problem with mystical authority.¹⁸ Distancing herself from the speaker of the vision mitigates the challenges to authority inherent in recording her revelations. As a strategy, this ambiguity manifests

itself in dialogues between the soul and God, a division that preserves God's authority so long as the two voices remain separate.¹⁹ While Mechthild makes full use of the dialogue form in other parts of her book (where, however, the separation of the voices often breaks down), in this vision, the ambiguity of voice emerges between the third-person narrator and the reticent first-person voice of Mechthild herself.²⁰ The separation between the two collapses when the first-person voice interjects at the moment of transsubstantiation. The narrator recounts how John the Baptist elevates and consecrates the host. As the host transforms, the first-person voice exclaims that “I no longer saw the wafer, but rather a bleeding lamb [. . .] It looked at *us* with such sweet eyes that I shall never be able to forget it” (emphasis added; II, 4: 91–93). In the next sentence, the third-person narrator returns: “Then the poor maid asked . . .” (II, 4: 93) The power of this image, indeed the power of the vision, seems to interrupt the distancing mechanisms used to soften the authoritative claims implicit in the writing process. We might speculate that the experience as narrated overpowers the narrator. Put another way, in describing the union with Christ, another union takes place: the voice of the narrator merges into the first-person voice belonging to the girl or maid.

The instability of the boundaries between the writer, the narrator, and the authoritative experiences described clearly points to the tension faced by Mechthild as a writer. Confronted with such a powerful vision of eucharistic union, the command to write it down as instruction, and contradicting rules about female silence, Mechthild initially disperses her voice within and throughout her text. Attempting to disguise the vexed problem of authority that her text represents, she chooses *not* to assert herself as a female, authority-claiming subject—that is, she often tries very hard not to say “I.” However, in avoiding making a first-person claim as Mechthild, she adopts a narrative, didactic, mediating voice that is clearly authoritative. In other words, as a result of her attempts to avoid adopting an authoritative subject position as a woman, she does precisely that: She adopts an authoritative subject position—the third-person narrating voice of instruction. The sudden intrusion of the first-person voice at the end of the vision disrupts this strategy: The narrator and the girl merge, even as do the host and the lamb, and the first-person subject is claimed. The ambiguities of authority and voice evident in this moment of disruption are illustrative of the contradictory effects of authority on the woman writer while the lack of resolution (the third-person voice returns after the outburst) reveals the persistence of the problem.

As I have indicated, however, the problem of authority is deeply implicated with gendered understandings of the female body. This connection is immediately apparent in the beginning of the vision when the mediating voice of the narrator reveals that the lesson of the vision concerns the body. The poor girl cannot go to mass “because she is not well enough” (*alleine si ... nit endohte*).²¹ *Endohte* is the negated preterite form of *tugen*, which is defined

as “to be able, beneficial, or useful,” or “to have strength.”²² The use of this verb thus signifies that moral or social usefulness and physical ability are closely linked concepts in the Christian value-system as presented here. The body’s illness or weakness hinders the completion of good works, which in this case would be attending mass. However, the narrator questions this link in distinguishing the will from bodily capabilities. The usefulness of good will or intention, she asserts, overcomes the problem of an unwell body.²³ In making good will the source of usefulness, Mechthild posits willfulness (*eigenwille*) as the cause of sinfulness. This shift is an early instance of what Amy Hollywood has shown to be Mechthild’s gradual change in attitude toward the body.²⁴ Whereas Book I of *The Flowing Light* seems to characterize a fight to the death between body and soul, by the end of the book (Books VI and VII) Mechthild displays a growing respect for the body, because it is through the body that she both experiences the divine and shares in the bodily suffering of Christ.²⁵ The shift of the source of sin away from the body is then reinforced by the vision of the mass, which the maid receives as a reward for her good will and in spite of her body.

Framing the vision as a response to a bodily state and implicitly questioning an evaluative understanding of the body’s usefulness, the narrator clearly works with a cultural and gendered understanding of the body. In order to explore precisely what constitutes this understanding and how it may be manifest in this vision, I turn now to a brief examination of medieval medical views of the female body.²⁶ The dominant medical views of the body and sexuality come down to the Middle Ages primarily from Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen.²⁷ From Hippocrates comes the theory that the body is made up, on a smaller scale, of the same humors that are present in the material world. Building on this theory, both Galen and Aristotle assert that the female is dominated by moisture and cold whereas the male is naturally dry and hot. Galen held that both females and males produced seeds that would then come together in the reproductive process. Aristotle, however, was of the opinion that the (active) male seed needed the (passive) female material in order to procreate. Both philosophers asserted, however, that in order for the proper comingling of seed and seed, or seed and material to take place, a great deal of heat was necessary. In the Aristotelian model, the male was seen as naturally hotter and thus more perfect. The woman was felt to be imperfect and incomplete precisely because of her lack of heat. Because of this lack, for instance, her genitals never descend and remain internal, the exact inversion of the male genitals. Also for this reason, the woman must menstruate, while the man must not. Menstruation (or bleeding) rids the woman of impure moistures she naturally carries, whereas men are naturally already dry and pure inside. Because the woman again is naturally moist and cold, because this is an imperfect state, and because, in the Aristotelian tradition, everything is always naturally striving to become perfect, the woman is thought to be continuously craving heat. Since men have heat in excess and since sex

generates the most heat, the woman is thus thought to be in a condition of perpetual desire for sex with men.²⁸ It should be noted here that the extent to which Aristotelian models for sex difference dominated medieval medical discourse has been a subject of recent debate among historians of science who argue for a more complex understanding of the ways especially scholastic authors received the various medical and philosophical authorities from antiquity. For example, in her study, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, Joan Cadden shows that treatments of this subject are “seldom unambiguously tied to a single ancient authority” (118). Yet, while there was considerable disagreement among medieval writers about precisely what qualities like heat might do, there was also consensus on the subject that heat was central to the differences between the sexes and that it proved in many arguments to be, as Cadden asserts, a “profoundly powerful explanatory principle” (171).

In a reading of the English mystic Julian of Norwich, Elizabeth Robertson takes the Aristotelian model as dominant, arguing that these ideas and views about female sexuality and desire must be seen to have conditioned how medieval religious women in general approached God. As she puts it:

[A] woman’s perceived bodily needs as outlined in the medical texts are viewed in the Middle Ages as the driving force of her eroticism. Her experience, as we shall see, was defined by Aristotelian ideas of her need for completion—for heat—and for the purging of excess moisture. In addition, the biological parity between blood, sweat, tears, milk, and urine meant that a woman’s contemplation of Christ’s blood was contemplation of her own blood, and further that her tears were equivalent to Christ’s blood. The suffering body of Christ thus allowed a woman not only to pity Christ but to identify in him her own perceived suffering body; moreover, union with his suffering body would allow her to realize her perceived biological needs.²⁹

Robertson finds that identification with Christ’s bleeding body gave holy women’s bleeding a more positive and redemptive meaning. In purging themselves of excess moisture, they could also save the world. Further, union with Christ, acting as a substitute for carnal sex, would produce the heat of which the woman is supposedly constantly in need. In Mechthild’s vision, the maid cannot attend the actual performance of the mass, a ceremony which enacts the mystical union in the form of the Eucharist. If we accept Robertson’s argument that the debates on sex difference—especially considering the focus on the role of heat and moisture—permeated popular conceptions of the body and sex, then it is possible to conclude that Mechthild needs this union as much as she needs, for example, sleep or water. The narrator’s introduction to the vision supports this reading, for the vision is granted precisely because of the maid’s *desire* for mass (In dirre begerunge *benam ir got alle ir irdensche sinne und brahte si wunderlich hin in ein schoene kilchen* (II, 4: 9–10, emphasis added; *in this desire* God took from her all her earthly senses and brought her in a wondrous fashion to a beautiful church). We might also say that the communion the vision supplies, so literally imagined and bodily received—the transformation of the Host into a bleeding lamb, its entering into her heart where she allows it to suckle—

would support such a reading. However, while the desire for union with male physical heat might indeed contribute to Mechthild's need for this vision, the final image of the lamb nursing on the maid's heart indicates that a need for male heat is not central to this union.³⁰ While it is brought on by a physical desire for mass and the Eucharist that was triggered because of the unwell body, the vision goes on to reveal the transformation of the weak feminine body into a body made legitimate and glorious by the embroidered cloak. Rather than celebrate the feminine, Mechthild refigures the feminine to accommodate an image of female writing.³¹

Exploring the vision as a response to gendered ideas about the female body thus requires anchoring medical views more firmly in Mechthild's milieu. As I have argued, the act of writing itself could be viewed as a challenge to clerical authority on a number of levels. Challenges were also present in the texts themselves, as is evident in the vision—unable to attend the mass provided by the local clergy, the poor maid envisions one celebrated by John the Baptist, who, as some critical clergy later point out to Mechthild, is not an ordained priest.³² In addition to what was apparently an open reprimand for Mechthild's infraction (having the layman John the Baptist preside over mass), the clerical response to such visionary challenges to their priestly role also took material and structural form. The policy of cloistering religious women, for example, can be seen as an attempt to control women's religious activity and served to enforce their silence. If the clergy did hold the view that women's bodies suffered from an insatiable desire for male heat, then claustration might also be seen as an attempt to isolate and protect monastic men from women's corrupting influence.³³ For nuns, this type of control took the architectural form of the convent, and, for beguines, the beguineage.³⁴ Moreover, women's presence in churches was also limited to certain areas.³⁵

The clerical apprehension about the presence of the female body expressed through these controls appears to affect the maid in the vision. At first empty, the church is then decorated by a number of angelic looking young male acolytes; John the Baptist enters carrying the lamb, and he is followed by John the Evangelist and St. Peter. Shortly thereafter, “[d]o kam ein grossú schar, das was das kreftige gesinde des himelriches, und fulleten die kilchen also vol, das die arme dirne dekeine stat konde vinden, da si bliben moehte” (II, 4: 31–33; There came a great host that was the powerful company of heaven, and they filled the church so full that the poor maid could find no place in which she could remain). As the church fills with important people from the biblical and liturgical tradition, the maid is quite literally out of place: there is no place for her to stand. This implies that the church has no place for someone of her status and gender. Thus, with no room for her in the nave, or main hall of the church, the maid retreats to the tower area away from the altar.³⁶ There she encounters still more people:

Do gieng si niden in den turn stan, da vant si einer hande lute mit wissem gewete, die enhatten kein har;

mere si hatten einvaltige kronen uf iren hovben. Das waren die nit hatten gelebt nach der e. Die gezierde des hares, das ist: guoter werken, hatten si nit. Wa mit waren si denne zuo dem himelriche komen? Mit rúwen und mit guotem willen an irem ende. Fürbas vant si noch schoener lute gekleidet mit vielvar cleidern, die waren gezieret mit schoenem hare der tugende und gekroenet mit der gottes e. Noch vant si schoener lute, die waren mit rosevar kleidern gekleidet, die hatten ein schoen zeichen der wittewen und ein cronen der angenommenen kuscheit. (II, 4: 34–42)

Then she went down into the tower [area] to stand, where she found a group of people dressed in white garments who had no hair; rather they had simple crowns on their heads. These were those who had not lived according to the law [of scripture]. The ornament of the hair means: of good works they had none. With what then did they enter heaven? With remorse and with good intentions at their life's end. Further she found even more beautiful people dressed in clothes of many colors, who were adorned with the beautiful hair of virtue and crowned with God's law. Then she found still more beautiful people, who were dressed in rose-colored clothes, they had a beautiful sign of widowhood and a crown of adopted chastity.

Retreating into the background, into the margins of the sacred space, the maid finds a group of perhaps less imposing people recognized according to their virtue: people without good works can attain heaven with good intentions, people who uphold God's law follow—whether this second group consists of male clergy or female nuns or both is not specified—and the most beautiful and honored in this ordering are those who take on chastity after marriage.³⁷ The reader might wonder whether the presence of these groups would make the maid feel more at ease in the imposing church. However, when she first turns an eye to herself, the contrast is decidedly repugnant. She sees herself in wretched clothing (*übel gekleidet*) and physically weak (*krank am libe*), *und bi den drin scharen mohte si niema bliben* (II, 4: 43–44; And among none of the three groups was she able to remain). Instead, she returns to the nave and looks into the choir, where she spots the more renowned religious women in attendance: among bishops, martyrs, angels, and virgins sit the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine, and St. Cecilia. The sight of this group, perhaps especially the named saints Catherine and Cecilia, causes her to reconsider herself and her presence or appearance in their company—Catherine was famous for convincing fifty philosophers to convert to Christianity solely on the basis of her rhetorical arguments and Cecilia, for convincing her husband not only to allow her to remain chaste but also to convert. These are women whose authority was claimed and asserted through rhetoric, through the use of words. Their presence in the church and, more importantly, their response to the maid seem to put her at ease with the claims on legitimacy made by her presence in the church: “Do dirre arme mensche dise grosse herschaft gesach, do besach si ovch sich selben, eb si bliben getoerste vor ir snoedekeit” (II, 4: 46–48; When the poor person beheld this great company, she examined herself as well and whether she dare stay there in her wretchedness).

The maid's discomfort in the ornate and impressive church and her consideration of her worthiness to remain there clearly reflect not only a sense of awe in the presence of so many holy men and women but also a response to the clerical apprehension about women's presence in sacred spaces. To the maid's surprise, though, she sees herself suddenly transformed: She wears a

beautiful crimson cloak adorned with gold and embroidered with a love song. She looks like one of the noble virgins and is crowned by a garland of gold on which another song is inscribed. Further, her face suddenly resembles the face of an angel. Expressing surprise, she asks: “Owe ich unselig phuol, wie ist mir nu geschehen? Joch bin ich leidor so selig nit, als ich mich da han gesehen” (II, 4: 55–56; Alas, foul puddle that I am, what has happened to me? Unfortunately I am not nearly so blessed as I have seen myself there).

To understand this change in self-image, we must first examine the mechanics of its narration. As the narrator describes the maid experiencing the vision of the church, the reader “sees” the maid among the impressive throngs of people in a large church. Suddenly, however, the maid having the vision sees *herself* in the church, adopting the perspective of the narrator. Thus not only are we faced with the ambiguity of who is speaking, as discussed earlier, but also we must consider whose gaze is being presented to the reader, who is seeing whom. The maid’s recognition of the poem on the cloak and of the likeness of her countenance to those of angels suggests that the image of the maid splits in two; the reader thus “sees” the new narrator view the other.

This doubled gaze points to an additional level of complexity to the writer’s response to her contradictory position as an embodied woman making claims on authority—at this juncture, simply by being in the church. Furthermore, the transformation of the maid produces a woman who is elevated from her wretched status, glorified with fine clothing and made equal to the heavenly courtiers. Making an explicit claim on such self-glorification would surely result in accusations of pride. The double vision thus distances the maid that much further from the narrator and Mechthild as writer, deferring the problem of authority not only through voice but also through the shifting directions of the gaze. The self description as a “foul puddle” (*unseligen phuol*), acts to soften the impact of the surprising transformation, for the epithet used resonates with the medical views discussed above of women as predominantly moist and therefore inferior. The word used here, *phuol/pfuol* also has the connotations of the filth, odor, moisture, and decay of a swamp. Indeed, in a lament about the lack of authority granted Mechthild as a female author, Mechthild uses this same phrase in reference to the unworthiness of her femininity. Were she a learned religious man, she writes, God would receive eternal praise for him. But how should her readers believe that God has built his “golden house” of divine love “in den unvletigen pfuol” (in the filthy swamp) that is Mechthild (II, 26:19–23)?

In other parts of the book, Mechthild uses this type of imagery to convey corruption associated with sin, particularly sensual sins like lechery or gluttony. For example, the representation of corrupt priests repeatedly being boiled in a purgatory of burning metal who had been greedy, gluttonous, and unchaste during their lifetimes (V, 14),³⁸ or Mechthild’s vision of the sinful recluses buried in a purgatorial swamp *gemischt von fûr und von beche, von pfuole, rovch und stanke* (III, 15: 31, mixed with fire, pitch, decay, smoke,

and stench).³⁹ There is clearly an association between the physical attributes of the body and sin—indeed, in Mechthild’s vision of creation, Adam and Eve only acquire genitalia after the Fall.⁴⁰ Moreover, she characterizes this change of the previously angelic body as a deformity (*verschaffen*), claiming that had the Holy Spirit created something so hideous (*egeschlich*), no one could have been ashamed of it (III, 9: 46–49). As Hildegard Keller has shown, the shame attached to sexed bodies (Mechthild refers to them as *schemeliche lide* or “shameful appendages”) acts as an eternal reminder of the errant free will of both Adam and Eve.⁴¹ This reading accords with Mechthild’s approach to the vision of the mass as discussed above. Her weak body prevents her from going to mass, but her good will is rewarded with the vision as a substitute. The source of sin is the will, not the body, swamp-like and hideous though it may be.

For Mechthild, discourses about the body are contested in negotiating the problem of authority and the body is not punished or mortified, rather it is transfigured.⁴² While the maid calls herself a foul puddle, an epithet invoking the commonplace of humility in religious writing, she also sees herself in glorious, text-bearing clothing and looking like an angel. What she speaks contradicts what she sees. The voice and the gaze each disrupt the claims of the other, defusing the challenge to authority implicit in the image. Despite this ambiguity—or perhaps because of it—the maid is convinced to move beyond the problematic understanding of herself and toward the glorified sight of herself. Significantly, encouragement comes from seeing the two saints, Catherine and Cecilia, both of whom are not only virgin martyrs but also women with considerable rhetorical preaching skills. The women in the choir, including the Virgin Mary, laugh indulgently at the maid’s surprise over her new look. Encouraged by this inclusive reception, the maid stands next to the Virgin Mary before going to her seat above Catherine, taking a moment to enjoy the contrast between herself, “the lowly crow,” and Mary, “the turtledove.”⁴³ Having achieved not only a transformed self-image but also a place to remain in the sacred space of the church, she gestures further at the humility topos in describing herself as the inferior crow, a gesture made quickly ambiguous as she boldly takes a place next to the mother of God, an opportunity, she notes, that is all too rare.

As Bardo Weiss has noted, the change from poorly clad wretch to gloriously adorned angelic virgin must be seen in relation to a “theology of clothing” rooted in Paul’s teachings on baptism.⁴⁴ In the letters to the Galicians, Paul proclaims, “[f]or as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3: 27).⁴⁵ In early typological readings of the New Testament, the incarnation is understood as the Divinity putting on Adam (or putting on a body) in order to reclothe humanity in the “robe of glory” that was stripped from Adam and Eve after the Fall.⁴⁶ When Christ is baptized in the river Jordan, he leaves the robe of glory there, making it available for humankind to put it on again in baptism; the invocation of the

Holy Spirit to consecrate the water at a Christian baptism connects the water of the font to that of the Jordan. As Sebastian Brock explains: “The ‘robe of glory’ which Adam and Eve lost in Paradise at the Fall is thus recovered by the Christian at Baptism in the font. Baptism is indeed a reentry into Paradise, but this is not just the Paradise of the beginning of time, but also an eschatological Paradise. There is a certain tension here, for at baptism the robe of glory is regained in potential, but not yet fully in reality, for this will only happen at the end of time, at the general resurrection” (13).

The robe has added connotations, as Brock suggests: “it is also the clothing of angels and of the just; it is furthermore a royal and priestly robe, and at the same time the ‘wedding garment’ for the eschatological banquet (Mt 22: 12)” (13). Given the preference for bridal imagery to describe the *unio mystica* in the chapters preceding the vision of the mass and given the role of communion in the mass of the vision, Mechthild’s transformation into what she will look like at the final resurrection and wedding banquet is clearly appropriate and, in a certain light, conventional. The presence of John the Baptist also makes a certain sense given this context.

However, the “robe of glory” in the vision of the maid is not simply the sign of acquired virtue, as in other parts of the book,⁴⁷ for it displays Mechthild’s own poetry: *Der mantel was gezieret mit golde und ovch mit einem liede* (II, 4: 50–51; the cloak was adorned with gold and with a song) and then she cites the first line—*ich sturbe gerne von minnen* (I would gladly die of love). This lyric appears two chapters earlier in Book II. Further, the golden garland around her head bears another song.⁴⁸ The theology of clothing is taken a step further. The glory of the maid in her transformed state at the final wedding banquet is attributable not only to the cloak but also to the writing on it. In my reading, the sight of the maid thus clothed and crowned in writing triggers her remarkable change in attitude. Indeed, this “self-image” gives the maid the courage to stand with the others in the vision, to claim the right to appear in this “public,” for suddenly, she is no longer different: “Si sach sich ovch einer edelen juncfrowen glich . . . Und ir antlút sach sich selben den engeln glich” (II, 4:50–51, 54–55; She saw herself likened to a noble virgin . . . And her countenance resembled that of the angels). The maid finds a place among the noble virgins and angels in that she is read, for the body is hidden by the cloth bearing the divine message of Mechthild’s poetry. The bodily surface made contemptible by sin as well as by contemporary ideologies of the feminine is replaced by the majestic crimson fabric and the golden crown. It is recast as pure representation.

As we have seen, the vision of the maid suggests that Mechthild is responding to disciplines (the control of sacred space) and discourses (the conception of the female body as moist and corrupt) as well as attempting to redefine what they mean. In the maid’s vision, the body is indeed presented as the bearer of signs, but these are not the signs of self-torture as Laurie Finke implies is the case for women mystics generally; rather, they are signs of

female authorship.⁴⁹ Instead of defeating the problem of the body by mortifying it, Mechthild sets the problem aside. The signs of her spiritual power, her writing of God's love, are not inscribed onto her body but rather embroidered onto her clothes. Faced with the problem of the body as culturally constructed in her milieu, Mechthild reclaims it, taking the theological and liturgical image of the ceremonial cloak (of glory, of authority, of Christianity) and adding an allusion to another medium associated with the feminine—that of embroidered textiles.⁵⁰ The representation of writing as embroidery can thus be seen as another strategy to divert attention from the active production of text by a woman (female authorship), disguising Mechthild's "dictation" from God as a task more suitably feminine in the eyes of her readers. Alternatively, the use of embroidered text might be viewed as a claim that writing is legitimately "women's work," especially considering that the viewers in the choir who reinforce the transformation, the ones who help the maid to accept it, are all women. The transformation thus legitimizes not only the poor and unworthy female body in the public space of the church but also female authorship itself.

The use of an image of female authorship to overcome the hideous body is especially poignant in Mechthild's case because the issue of female authorship is addressed explicitly throughout the book. While, as we have seen, the first-person voice is often attributed to the soul, God, or other actors in the mystical drama, occasionally an unmediated first-person voice discusses the book and its composition in anxious terms. For example, a section subsequent to the vision discussed here begins: "Ich wart vor disem buoche gewarnet, und wart von menschen also gesaget: Woelte man es nit bewaren, da moehte ein brant úber varen" (II, 26:1–2; I was warned against this book and was told by people: if one did not protect it, it could be burned). Because of this anxiety over whether the book might be condemned and burned, the narrator prays and is answered immediately with God's appearance in her soul. A dialogue ensues in which the soul expresses further anxiety—not over the book's "truth" content, however, but rather, as mentioned previously, over gender: "Eya herre, were ich ein geleret geistlich man, und hettistu dis einig grosse wunder an im getan, so moehtistu sin ewige ere enpfahen. Wie sol man dir nu des getrúwen, das du in den unvletigen pful hast ein guldin hus gebuwen und wonest da werlich inne mit diner muoter und mit allen creaturen und mit allem dinem himelschem gesinde? Herre, da kan dich dú irdensche wisheit nit gevinden" (II, 26:19–23; Ah, Lord, were I a learned religious man, and had you performed this singular great miracle in him, you would receive everlasting honor for it. Now how is one supposed to believe it of you that you have built a golden house in this filthy swamp and really live in it with your mother, with all creatures, and with your heavenly company? Lord, earthly wisdom will not be able to find you there). This passage indicates that not only sexual difference but also the cultural meanings given sexual

difference, the gendered understanding of woman's body not only as female but also as comparable to a "filthy swamp" (*unvletigen pfuol*) are vexing. The repetition of the German words here (translated in the vision of the mass as "foul puddle") underscores the force of this gendered image, both for the writer and for her audience. In effect, the voice of the soul points out the unlikelihood that mortal readers ("earthly wisdom") will be able to see beyond gender at all when they read her book.

In another chapter that includes an erotic dialogue between the soul and Christ followed by an elaborate vision of heaven, several interjections by an unmediated first-person narrator describe another aspect of the dilemma faced by the woman writer. In the middle of the long vision, the unmediated first-person voice breaks in: "Ich han da inne ungehoertú ding gesehen, als mine bihter sagent, wan ich der schrift ungeleret bin. Nu voerhte ich got, ob ich swige, und voerhte aber unbekante lute ob ich schribe" (III, 1: 36–38; I have seen therein unheard of things, as my confessors say, for I am untrained in Scripture. Now I fear God if I am silent, and yet I fear unknown [or unknowing] people if I write). Despite the awareness that the visions are unlearned and potentially transgressive, the command to write, coming as it does from the highest authority, makes silence impossible. This dilemma may also explain the lack of book imagery in the maid's vision. As I argued in Chapter 1, being untrained in Scripture does not mean that Mechthild could not read Latin but rather more likely that she could not write it. As we have seen, Mechthild's choice to write in German and not to dictate to a Latinate scribe represents a clear departure from the conventional use of Latin for sacred texts. The representation here of her writing as embroidery on cloth rather than as writing on pages in a book further symbolizes this departure—that is, the claim to transmit divine truths unmediated by clerical Latinity.⁵¹

These anxieties clearly inform and resonate in the vision of the mass. As I have argued, the transformation of the wretched (swamp-like) maiden into a body hidden in a text-bearing cloak leads to a positive reinscribing of the body through the senses. The body, if at first concealed, is nevertheless not something to be escaped or disciplined into holiness. Indeed, if we turn now to the union that is subsequently enacted in the vision, we see that the text on the cloak acts as another level of narration of the vision, for the experience of communion as described in the vision coincides with the description of the poem on the cloak. "The one I love," it reads, "I have seen him with my bright eyes standing in my soul" (II, 2).

As the vision reports, John the Baptist carries the lamb into the church and he subsequently also performs the eucharistic ceremony.⁵² At the moment of consecration, the maid (whose narrated perspective, as we have seen, is momentarily conflated with a first-person voice) sees the Host joining itself to the lamb "so that I no longer saw the wafer, but rather a bleeding lamb hanging on a red cross." To understand the full impact of this moment in the vision, we must consider that the moment of consecration in the eucharistic

ceremony was a matter of significant debate during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 addressed the matter explicitly: “There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed [*transubstantiatio*] by divine power into the body, and wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of him what he has received of us.”⁵³ This decree made explicit what theologians and laypeople had been debating for three centuries—that the host, once elevated and consecrated by the priest actually became Christ.⁵⁴ The substantial presence of Christ in the Host made for certain doctrinal problems for theologians, however. For Christ’s actual presence in the wafer might imply that he, like the wafer, was very fragile and thus subject to fragmentation, crumbling, and profanation. Writing in the mid-thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas addressed this problem by arguing that Christ was fully present in each particle and drop of the bread and wine. Further debate arose concerning whether Christ could be fully present in the wafer (the flesh), usually consecrated before the wine (the blood). In response to this question, theologians developed the doctrine of “concomitance,” which insisted that Christ’s unity—both flesh and blood—was present in both the bread and the wine.⁵⁵

Christ’s actual presence on the altar in the hands of the priest made the celebration of the Eucharist into a fantastic and magical ritual. The wafer and the wine were thus thought to hold miraculous properties.⁵⁶ The increasing importance of the Eucharist as a symbol and ritual is evidenced definitively in the thirteenth century by the development of a festival for its celebration outside of mass (the feast of Corpus Christi was instituted in 1246 after a long campaign by two religious women, Juliana of Cornillon and Eve of St. Martin).⁵⁷ The growth in popularity of this ritual coincided with an increasing priestly anxiety over its control. Because of the literal understanding of transubstantiation, the timing of the consecration of the Host became equally significant. If the priest raised the host without consecrating it first, or without consecrating the wine, it was possible that the worshipers were adoring nothing more than flour and water, which constituted idolatry.⁵⁸ The wine/blood was thought to be especially dangerous because as a fluid it could be difficult to contain and as wine with alcoholic as well as magical properties it could be intoxicating. By the end of the thirteenth century the Dominicans thought wine dangerous enough to withdraw the chalice from the laity.⁵⁹ Though not yet instituted in Mechthild’s lifetime, in the later Middle Ages in parts of northern Europe the act of consecration was performed behind screens, which to varying degrees concealed this meeting between priest and God from the eyes of the congregation.⁶⁰

Viewed against this background, the moment of elevation in the maid’s vision seems quite bold indeed. John the Baptist was of course often depicted

in the visual arts carrying the lamb.⁶¹ With the increasing focus on the Eucharist in the thirteenth century came depictions of the slaughtered lamb on the altar, an image taken up in the vision of the maid.⁶² Noteworthy here are the very physical terms with which the image is described: The lamb is not only physically present in the hands of the celebrant, but it is also bleeding. The moment of communion between the maid and the lamb, supervised by the Virgin Mary, follows. John lifts the lamb *mit sinen roten wunden* (with its red wounds) and lays it on her mouth, from where the lamb makes its way directly into her soul. The maid's body, the questionable surface of which has been covered by the authorizing cloak, must nevertheless be present in order for union to take place. In a sense, the theology of the Host is being used to figure the maid's body. Although theologians asserted forcefully that Christ is present in the bread, the miracle of transubstantiation lies in that, once consecrated, the bread still tastes and feels like bread.⁶³ Nevertheless, its "bread-ness" has been replaced by "Christ-ness." In the same way, the problematic qualities associated with the female body are now absent from the maid, but a bodily quality remains so that the Host can be ingested and communion can occur. In this case, though, the Host is a bleeding lamb that is clearly still alive. Thus, the final image explodes the usual models for understanding and viewing the celebration of the Host: "Then the poor maid went to the altar with great love and with an open soul. Then Saint John took the white lamb with its red wounds and laid it in the jaws of her mouth. Then the pure lamb laid itself on its own image in her stall and suckled on her heart with its sweet mouth. The more it suckled, the more she gave it." After the maid receives the Host/lamb "in the jaws of her mouth," she swallows, allowing the lamb to proceed to the place where its image is inscribed, that is, the lamb's "stall" in the maid's soul. Her cloaked body is now suddenly transparent as the maid consumes, encircles, possesses, and encloses the lamb inside her, even as it also consumes her, suckling on her heart. In an admittedly startling image, the maid and Christ warmly drink each other's blood.⁶⁴

While it was not uncommon to imagine the transubstantiated Host as the Christ child or as a lamb being prepared for sacrifice (as in the story of Isaac),⁶⁵ the iconography of John the Baptist, Mary, and the Eucharist are combined here to produce a singular image. Increasingly venerated in the thirteenth century for her actions as intermediary between poor souls and God, Mary fulfills this role in the vision. The maid makes her request for the Eucharist not from the celebrant but from the Virgin Mary who has been observing the mass in a supervisory way. Acting as mediator Mary thus transmits the maid's request for the wafer. This conventional understanding of Mary's role is augmented with another: Mary's request or prayer (*gebette*) is depicted as *ein lúhtendú strale* (a radiant beam) that *schein usser únsrer vrouwen munt uf den altar und ruorte das lamp* (II, 4: 95–96; shined forth from the mouth of Our Lady onto the altar and touched the lamb). The stream

of light as holy message recalls the iconography of the Annunciation, where Mary is represented *receiving the* Holy Spirit as a beam or ray of light. In Mechthild's vision, however, Mary is the *source* of the divine beacon and she sends a message to God in his fleshly form, represented here as the sacrificial lamb. The touch of Mary's light invites and incites the lamb to respond: "Muoter, ich wil mich gerne legen in die stat diner girde" (II, 4: 97; Mother, I shall gladly lay myself in the place of your desire). Mary is clearly the one in charge in this image, though perhaps this is not surprising when we consider that Christ appears as a child innocent in the form of the lamb. When union occurs, then, when the maid nurses the lamb, she steps into the role of Mary, the only woman since Eve's fall to have untainted flesh, as well as the only woman to be tolerated in the role of priest.⁶⁶ But it is also Mary who presides from the choir over the maid's transformation, who guides the maid through the intricacies of the mass, who has, in a sense, been the major authority figure in this vision. If we remember that the maid's body has been elided in favor of the signs of female authorship, the final image, then, shows how the body is reclaimed and in the process offers a unique new iconography of female authority.

* * *

In this chapter, I have tried to show, first, that the problem of female authority paradoxically leads to the assertion of female textual authority (that is, female authorship) and, second, that the negotiations of this problem necessarily implicate the issues surrounding the cultural meanings of the female body. Indeed, Mechthild responds in the vision to the problems of authority and body precisely by exploring and articulating in and through text the position of a writing and teaching woman, a woman clothed in words. The wretched maid is literally refashioned into an icon of female authorship and authority. In my concluding remarks, I consider the clerical response to this refashioning—that is, the authorities' criticism of Mechthild's constructed authority. Although we do not have the exact wording of this response, the reaction to it recorded in Book VI some fifteen to twenty years later points both to the longevity of Mechthild's struggle with authority and to her changing attitudes toward it.⁶⁷

As Mechthild's response to this critique indicates, her error was found in the fact that John the Baptist was a layman and therefore unfit to perform the mass. The problem thus lies in the clear challenge to priestly authority and domain implied by a layman performing mass while St. Peter, the first Pope, stands idly by. In the vision in Book II, John is described as having been ordained "in his mother's womb by the Holy Spirit," referring to the biblical episode of Mary's visit to Elizabeth who was pregnant with John at the time. When Mary draws near, the fetus in Elizabeth's womb jumps, becoming filled with the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ Perhaps the offended cleric felt threatened also by the implicit claim that Mary, a woman (albeit perfect and pure), has the authority

to ordain a priest. In the response, though, this justification is not mentioned. Rather, the section begins with a discussion of the relationship between visionary and real events: “Das Johannes Baptista der armen dirnen messe sang, das was nit vleischlich, es was also geistlich, das die sele alleine beschowete, bekante und gebruchte; aber der licham hatte nit da von, denne er von der sele edelkeit in sinen menschlichen sinnen mohte begriffen; darumb muessent dú wort menschlichen luten” (VI, 36: 8–11; That John the Baptist sang the mass for the poor maid was not of the flesh; it was so spiritual that only the soul saw it, understood it, and enjoyed it; But the body had nothing from it except what it could grasp from the nobility of the soul in its human senses. For this reason the words have to sound human.) This comment underscores my argument about the troublesome connection between the problem of the body and that of authority. In defending the *auctoritas* of her previous vision, the writer must now explain how physical or bodily reality is connected to the vision.⁶⁹ That is, the challenge to the priest’s authority is a bodily challenge: The concern is that John the Baptist’s unordained body held the sacred body of Christ and that Mechthild’s inferior and impure body tasted, enclosed, and nursed it. This is why Mechthild must assert here that she did not really receive communion (“the body had nothing from it”), that she did not swallow anything “in the flesh.”

The angry tone and content of what follows this comment, however, suggests that Mechthild has become frustrated with this link. The anxiety that no one will be able to read past her gendered body has proven true, for the clerics’ “problem” with the status of the unordained body holding Christ’s body has prevented him from reading her text properly. If the maid of the vision was authorized by the signs of female authorship and legitimized in that she was read, the critique of the vision suggests that Mechthild “in the flesh” is not. Her authorization through and in the text, while always painstakingly constructed, is easily undermined in the world. She therefore responds to the critique as if to a misreading, arguing for her interpretation of John’s suitability as a handler of Christ. Because he “touched” (*beruorte*) the Son of God while he was leading a holy life and because he preached “allen lúten den heligen cristanen gelovben und bewisete mit sinem vingere den lúten uf den waren gottes sun, der da gegenwertig was: ‘Ecce agnus dei’” (VI, 36: 17–19; the Christian faith to all the people and pointed out for the people with his finger the true Son of God who was there present: ‘Behold the Lamb of God’), he is in Mechthild’s eyes more than qualified to touch the Christ who is present in the Host. Furthermore, his authority is established in relation “to all people” and not only to priests. It is thus no longer the mystic’s body that is the “site of contested discourses about the body—and about culture,” as Laurie Finke argues, but rather it is the text itself. Mechthild’s response to the misreading of her text and to the challenge to her authority is finally to change strategies. Instead of masking her claims with humility or through a reclaiming of the body from the negative ideologies in which it is bound, she

now challenges clerical authority outright and reclaims authority over what she has written and its meaning: “Das Johannes Baptista gottes wort sprach, alsus verre mag es niemer babest noch bischof noch priester vollebringen denne alleine mit únsrem unsinnelichem cristanem gelovben. Was dis ein leie? Berihtent mich, ir blinden; uwer luginen und úwer has wirt uch niemer vergeben ane pine!” (VI, 36: 19–23; That John the Baptist spoke God’s word, such a thing can neither pope nor bishop nor priest ever bring to pass except through our intangible Christian faith. Was this a layman? Prove me wrong, you blind ones; your lies and your hate shall never be forgiven you without pain!) Mechthild confirms clerical fears in no uncertain terms. Openly disputing the clergy’s institutional positions as God’s chosen mediators, she reminds them that their power-base is founded on the “Christian faith” of “all people”—which is *unsinnelichem* or above human perception or understanding. More significantly, she also invites them to “prove her wrong,” that is, to engage in a rhetorical, exegetical debate about the interpretation of the new “scripture” her text transmits. The absence of the mitigating strategies used earlier in the maid’s vision indicates that the problems of authority and of the body are no longer Mechthild’s; rather, she responds to the critics’ problems with body and with her authority. At least at this moment, then, it appears that Mechthild asserts her authority and authorship independent of the body, whether *úbel* or refashioned, a privilege usually reserved for male clergy. In a kind of postscript to the vision of the maid, Mechthild here steps out of the cloak of authority and picks up the proverbial glove, offering a resounding challenge both to the gendered assumptions that hound her and to the authorities who perpetuate them.

Transmission Lessons: Gender, Audience, and the Mystical Handbook

Dis buoch sol man gerne enpfan, wan got sprichet selber dú wort. Dis buoch das sende ich nu ze botten allen geistlichen lúten beidú boesen und guoten . . . (Prologue, 1–4)¹

One should gladly receive this book, for God himself speaks the words. I send this book now as a messenger to all religious people, both the bad and the good . . .

Mechthild's striking and conflicted visions of authority and authorship in *The Flowing Light* lead us to ask: What measure of authority and authorship did medieval audiences actually grant Mechthild and her writings? The Prologue clearly admonishes all religious people to read and learn from the book. But how many did read it and for what purposes? Did they read it as God's book, as it is presented, or as Mechthild's? Authority derives after all not merely from a claim or an assertion of authority but also from an external acknowledgment of that claim. We can assert authority *ad infinitum*, but we cannot have it until someone else believes that we do, whether because of how we act, because of who supports us, or because of a position held within a social or institutional hierarchy.

It is of course impossible to determine precisely how many people read Mechthild's book or whether they believed in her authority when they did. However, internal textual evidence suggests that Mechthild's book was circulated in a variety of forms over the long period of time during which she wrote it (ca. 1250 until her death in 1282). The translation into Latin consists of only the first six books, suggesting that this version was taken to Halle to be translated not long after Mechthild entered the convent at Helfta, where she wrote the final book.² The table of contents in the Latin Foreword to the Middle High German version covers material from only Books I through V, suggesting that this set of writings was also circulated at some time as a unit. A comment in the last chapter of Book IV—"This book was begun in love, it shall also end in love"³—has been cited frequently as evidence for the understanding of Books I through IV as a work.⁴ The warning against publication and request for the protection of those who copy it at the end of Book II (II, 26, quoted in Chapters 1 and 2) can also be seen as an indication

that Books I and II were circulated together at one time. Finally, Book I's almost exclusive focus on the lyrical representation of the mystical union and conversation could also indicate that it, too, was disseminated as a unit while Mechthild went on to write Book II.⁵ It seems clear, then, that by 1270 when Mechthild enters the convent at Helfta, several "editions" of her writings had been circulating and that sometime after 1271, the Dominicans at Halle took a sort of "collected works" (Books I through VI) to be translated into Latin.⁶ Mechthild's acceptance into the convent and the lively circulation of her writings thus indicates that by the end of her life, she had achieved a certain degree of authority, at least among other religious women in her region, and among the Dominicans who provided her with guidance. Evidence of the esteem in which Mechthild was held by her peers in Helfta can be found in the writings of her younger contemporaries there. Mechthild's death is discussed in Gertrud of Helfta's *Legatus divinae pietatis* (V, 7).⁷ And in the writings of both Gertrud and Mechthild of Hackeborn, Mechthild of Magdeburg, or "Sister M," is referred to admiringly.⁸ In Gertrud's book, she tells of praying for Mechthild of Magdeburg when the latter is lying on her deathbed. In the conversation with God that follows, Gertrud asks why God has not performed any miracles through Mechthild in order to prove the truth of her revelations. In answer, Gertrud sees God holding Mechthild's book in his hand while explaining that it is easier to convert people through the inner experience of His grace than through miracles.⁹ This vision is a fascinating confirmation of the problems associated with female authorship expressed throughout Mechthild's book itself, as well as a confirmation of the solution—God claims the book as his own. Further, it suggests that Gertrud's respect for Mechthild is connected not only to her mystical experience but also to the book she wrote about it.

Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Liber specialis gratiae* has a vision of virgins dancing around Christ in heaven and "Sister M" appears with these virgins, illuminated by a ray of light from the heart of Christ, an interesting variant of the annunciation iconography used in connection with Mary in the vision of the maid discussed in Chapter 2.¹⁰ Mechthild also refers to this esteem in Book VII, the book she completed while at Helfta: "Ir wellent lere haben von mir und ich selber ungeleret bin. Des ir ie gerent, das vindent ir tusentvalt in úweren buochen" (VII, 21: 2–3; You wish to have instruction from me though I myself am unlearned. All that you could ever wish for, you will find a thousandfold more plentiful in your books). The nuns' request for instruction is another clear indication of the admiration and authority Mechthild of Magdeburg has in her sisters' eyes not only as someone graced with divine love but also as someone bearing the authority to teach.

The respect for Mechthild and her book in Helfta notwithstanding, there are unfortunately no surviving manuscripts of *The Flowing Light* that were owned by Helfta nuns. The books in Helfta's library, no doubt a considerable number, were of course vulnerable to the violent attacks of local warring

nobles. Two years after Mechthild's death, for example, Gebhardt of Mansfeld violently invaded the cloister with a band of followers. In 1342, Albert of Brunswick invaded Helfta with a large army over a dispute about his failed election to the episcopacy. He set fire to the convent and his men destroyed books, vestments, and whatever else they could find. These two invasions alone could account for the loss of any manuscripts the nuns may have had, the complete Low German version of *The Flowing Light* among them. However, forced changes of location on several occasions may also have contributed to losses from the library. Moreover, during the Reformation a group of angry peasants attacked and pillaged the convent, throwing manuscripts and books into beer vats. The community dispersed shortly thereafter, leaving only the very little evidence we can glean from the other Helfta mystics' writings and no Low German original.¹¹

In this chapter we move beyond the authority granted Mechthild by those who knew her at Helfta and elsewhere and examine instead her authority after her death insofar as it can be explored in the manuscripts that have survived. This exploration will in turn provide us with insights into the world of medieval religious books. Mechthild's place in these books and the traditions they construct is our first indication not only of the authority accorded her by her later medieval readers, but also of why this authority dwindled over time.¹²

According to the surviving manuscripts that transmit Mechthild's book either in Latin or in German, in whole or in part, a variety of people believed enough in Mechthild's authority as a messenger of God to try delivering her writings to a variety of audiences and in a number of different forms. The book was translated twice, a Latin version of Books I through VI (completed before 1298; 2 mss.) and a Middle High German version of Books I through VII (1345; 1 ms.); the Latin version was translated back into Middle High German (1 ms.); and the High German translation has survived in excerpts included in devotional anthologies (manuscript compilations that gather together a variety of religious, often mystical texts, excluding the Bible, and that are most commonly produced for private or communal use in a religious community; 15 mss.).¹³ Further, in the letter sent with the Middle High German translation to Dominican nun Margaret Ebner in 1345, the priest Heinrich of Nördlingen calls Mechthild's book "das lustigistz tiitzsch [. . .] und das innerlichst riirend minenschosz, das ich in tiitzscher sprach ie gelas" (the most pleasing German [. . .] and the most inwardly touching sudden love I have ever read in the German language).¹⁴ In addition, there are possible references to Mechthild in the revelations of two fifteenth-century religious women. Magdalena Beutlerin of Freiburg (1407–1458) reports a vision in which the holy virgins "Sant Hiltgart und Mehtildis" appear to her.¹⁵ Alijt Bake of Ghent (ca. 1415–1455) includes an exemplum in one of her tracts that describes a *Machtelt* who had been blessed with many visions. Kurt Ruh believes this story to be about Mechthild of Magdeburg.¹⁶ Heinrich of

Nördlingen's praise and the possible references in the revelations of two fifteenth-century religious writers might suggest to her modern readers that Mechthild had "made a name for herself" (was granted authority as an *auctor*) that lasted some years beyond her death. Why, then, did this name and text need to be "rediscovered," first in the nineteenth century by German philologists and again in the late twentieth century by feminist medievalists? That is, if Mechthild and her book were already held to be part of a tradition of some kind in the fourteenth century, what made her fall into an oblivion from which she has twice been recalled?

This kind of question emerged as an urgent point of scholarly debate in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Since the publication of works such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* in the late 1970s, feminists have been grappling not only with the problem of recovering female authors into canons of literature and history but also with the problem of explaining why this recovery was necessary.¹⁷ While the recuperation of female-authored texts often rests on an assumption that the texts were excluded or neglected precisely because they were female-authored, the process of textual transmission laid out in the manuscript reception of Mechthild's book demonstrates the inadequacy of exclusion as an explanatory model. Gisela Vollmann-Profe has suggested in her Foreword to Hans Neumann's critical edition that any coherence attached to Mechthild's "loosely organized work" came from the "person" or "personality" of the author and her life story. As soon as the interest in Mechthild as a living holy woman receded, argues Vollmann-Profe, so did the interest in preserving the book associated with her.¹⁸ For Vollmann-Profe, once this dissociation occurred, the writings became more important for what they say than for who wrote them, ending up as fodder for compilers of the increasingly popular devotional handbooks of the fifteenth century.¹⁹ Yet, as I will argue, the manuscript evidence shows that the disappearance of Mechthild happened the other way around. Because her writings became important for what they say, indeed, because they contributed to a new tradition of vernacular mystical prose, her name became dissociated from them. Mechthild's book was preserved in some cases *despite* knowledge of its author. From the two main redactions of the work (the Latin and Middle High German translations) and the three compilation manuscripts that contain multiple chapters of *The Flowing Light*, we learn that the "loss" of Mechthild's book was the consequence of precisely these efforts to preserve her writings either in spite of or disregarding the woman who wrote them and the book from which they came.²⁰

In answering the two questions with which I began—(1) To what extent was Mechthild and/or her book granted authority? and (2) Why did Mechthild and her book disappear from history?—this investigation illuminates the complexities of authority and authorship in the context of late medieval religious culture as it is constructed by the medieval German book. As will become clear, gender matters in some instances of reception while in others it

does not. The transmission of the Latin translation and the complete Middle High German translation will show how female authorship was a problem of varying degrees, depending on the makeup of the implied audience. On the one hand, for the learned audience addressed in Latin, the translators downplay Mechthild's agency as an author in favor of her agency as a messenger of God and edit her text to look more like other holy teachings.²¹ These changes solve the conceptual and doctrinal problem elicited when a religious woman, banned by the Church from teaching in public because of her gender, authors a didactic religious text appearing in the universal language of the Church and meant for all. On the other hand, the German translator, Heinrich of Nördlingen praises the text and its author in his letters but never names her and sends the book to groups of cloistered women. The surviving copy of his translation was owned by a woman and bequeathed to a group of isolated forest beguines. Female authorship proves to be less of a problem for Heinrich and the female owner of his translation because the church allowed and even encouraged women to teach in private (their husbands, their families, or other women). Indeed, the two references to Mechthild by fifteenth-century women mystics are evidence of the authority of Mechthild's name as a teacher of or an example for other women. Magdalena Beutlerin sees Mechthild in a vision in which Mechthild responds instructively to Magdalena's questions about Mechthild's life and death. For Alijt Bake, Mechthild is quite literally an example; she uses Mechthild's story in an exemplum. The two translations and these later references to Mechthild offer the insight that female authorship is a greater conceptual problem for the transmitter when it involves a claim on the category of the universal, of being appropriate and acceptable for dissemination to all creatures. Because of the conceptual dissonance between the public authority to which authorship lays claim and the social positioning of women as lacking authority, the redactors must explain the female authorship as indirect, thereby minimizing its challenge. *The Flowing Light* gleams its authority and legitimacy from the authorship of God, in the shadow of which the authorship of Mechthild is obscured.

The authorship of God is also the dominating organizing principle in the three German devotional anthologies examined here. Whereas the two main redactions figure this authorship as coming through an earthly agent, the anthologies generally ignore earthly authorship. I attribute this difference to the use or function of these books in relation to the audiences who made and used them. The manuscripts in question function as guides for mystical contemplation or for the composition of sermons, guides that have a quasipublic function (teaching) but nevertheless seem constructed for private use (contemplation of God). For this reason, we might also call them mystical handbooks. Furthermore, Mechthild's writings functioned within these books as part of the dialogic devotional practices of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that grew out of the flowering of a new mysticism in the thirteenth

century.²² Placed in dialogue with quotes from Latin scripture and liturgy, theological tracts, and various other unattributed sermons and treatises, the selections from *The Flowing Light* gain authority by association with other religious authorities or words of God. Insofar as the selections are present in books with practical religious aims, they are fulfilling the stated goal of the book—the spiritual edification of all religious people. The irony of achieving this goal, however, is that Mechthild’s name becomes dissociated from the writings (a fate to which she herself would not have objected, wanting only God’s glory, not her own). Mechthild’s obscurity results not only from the ideological problem of female authorship (the devaluing of an active authorial role) but also from the lively participation of her writings in a religious textual practice that valued the conversation with God more than authors’ names.

The Latin Translators

When Mechthild writes explicitly about her authorship in Book II, she worries not only about her gender but also about her lack of the kind of education that would legitimize a book transmitting divine instruction. “If I were a *learned* religious man,” writes Mechthild in Book II addressing God, “and if you had performed this unique great miracle using him, you would receive everlasting honor for it [emphasis added].”²³ In Book III, she comments on a vision: “I saw there things never heard before, my confessors tell me, for I am *unlearned* in Scripture [emphasis added].”²⁴ Writing in Book IV about the first time she revealed her revelations to her confessor, she records the advice she received: “Then he gave me a command that often makes me ashamed [. . .] that is, he commanded me, a frail woman, to write this book out of God’s heart and mouth. And so this book has come lovingly from God and does not have its origins in human *thought*.”²⁵ Finally, as mentioned earlier, Mechthild complains when her companions at Helfta ask her for instruction when in her mind, the nuns can find much more instruction in their books (VII, 21).

Ursula Peters has argued that these and the other few “seemingly” autobiographical comments in *The Flowing Light* owe more to a growing hagiographical tradition for semi-religious women and the conventions and topoi associated with it than they do to the actual life experiences of the Sister Mechthild named in the text.²⁶ Peters is right to point out the importance of hagiographic discourse in the composition of the book. Yet the outspoken critiques of women who teach publicly, made by prominent Dominican theologians (Henry of Ghent, Thomas Aquinas, Humbert of Romans), suggest more immediate and practical reasons for this command to write that go beyond genre. As a woman, Mechthild is forbidden to speak, but as an obedient religious woman under the supervision of Dominicans, she is compelled to write. Moreover, the material changes the Latin translators make to *The Flowing Light* confirm that Mechthild’s concern about an unlearned

authorship was well-founded. For while the Dominicans obviously supported her mission to reach out to the universal church in the vernacular, their Latin translation is not merely an attempt to reach audiences whose vernaculars were other than German. Rather, the *Lux divinitatis*, as the translation is known, reconfigures the text for a learned male audience, seeking to downplay even further the human—in this case, female—agency in the writings. In effect, what we see here is the process in which the translator tries to have it both ways—on the one hand transmitting Mechthild’s writings to a wider audience and thereby granting them a degree of legitimacy as bearer of a universal truth, and, on the other, obeying clerical policies on women’s preaching that judge public instruction by women to be blasphemous and dangerous.

It is now commonplace knowledge in Mechthild scholarship that the changes the Latin translator makes are significant. Susanne Köbele suggests that the Latin translation was meant to return Mechthild’s work into the *hermetische Exklusivität des Lateinischen* (hermetic exclusivity of Latin) and that, in so doing, it robs her text of *das Innovative der Denk- und Sprachgestalt* (what is innovative in the form of its thought and language).²⁷ Others remark on the re-ordering of the book according to subject matter, the softening of outright critiques of the clergy, and the rephrasing of the erotic imagery.²⁸ Most of the changes to Mechthild’s more erotic chapters tend to recast her German poetic allusions to the passionate Song of Songs back into the Latin vocabulary of the biblical text or, alternatively, into that of the Psalms. In a chapter from Book I, for example, describing the *hoverreise* (journey) to court of the soul, the narrator declares, “*Alse si nut mere moegi*, so ist er minnesiech nach ir, als er ie was . . .” (I, 4: 8–9, *When she was no longer able* [to be united with the high prince], then he was lovesick for her, as he had always been). For the italicized portion of the quote, the Latin translators write: *Cumque sic in salutari defecerit* (When thus she will have fainted in the greeting), an almost direct quote of the language in Psalm 118: 81 (*defecit in salutare tuum anima mea*; my soul hath fainted in thy salvation).²⁹ Similarly, after praising God for his burning desire and melting love, the soul claims, *ane dich mag ich nut wesen* (1,17: 4–5, I cannot exist without you). The Latin for this phrase returns the sentiment to the language of the Song of Songs and the Psalms: *languedo et deficio in absencia tua* (I languish and weaken in your absence).³⁰ The Latin *languedo* would remind the devotional reader of the Song of Songs 5:8 “I adjure you, daughters of Jersusalem if you find my beloved, tell him that I languish with love (*quia amore languedo*)” *Deficio* again recalls the vocabulary of Psalm 118.

In the next chapter of Book I, God responds to the soul’s praise, calling her in turn, a beautiful rose, a flying bee, a pure dove, a beautiful sun, and a full moon. He then tells her, *ich mag mich nit von dirgekeren* (1,18: 4; I cannot turn away from you). Neumann notes in his apparatus to this line that the Latin revelations translate *mich* with *oculos meos*, *von dir* with *a tuo*

conspectu, and *gekeren* with *auertere*.³¹ The reflexive verb in the German indicates that the divine speaker must be understood as the embodied Christ, for the language suggests an irresistible physical attraction—*ich kan mich nit von dir gekeren*, while the Latin suggests the more distant God as father, an entity who is watching the soul (as a rose, a bee, a dove, and so on) and cannot avert His eyes. This is admittedly a subtle change, nor should we expect a word-for-word translation. Rather, this editing presents an instance of the attempt to return innovations found in the vernacular to the hermetic world of Latin religious discourse. This conclusion is also borne out in the omissions from the Latin revelations. Chapter I, 22, for example, presents a series of intensifying paradoxes describing the soul's experience during union. "The longer she is dead," reads one line, "the more joyfully she lives; the more joyfully she lives, the more she experiences" (I, 22: 12–13), and so on, until we come to the suggestive line: *ie das minnebet enger wirt, ie die umbehalsunge nahergat* (I, 22: 27, the more narrow the love bed becomes, the tighter the embrace). This line does not appear in the Latin translation, however. Along the same lines, regarding a later chapter in Book I (I, 44) where the soul talks about having her way with the divine lover, Neumann notes that much of the dialogue is abbreviated and made more general in the Latin version, probably "to avoid giving offence" (*um Anstofizu vermeiden*).³² And, indeed, in the translator's prologue, readers are instructed that they "must read in a pious spirit" and that "[the book] must be understood, as is the case with other holy writings, in a wholesome manner and in good faith. In this way, the reader will find nothing scandalous or *offensive* in it, and the writing itself will not be subjected to any perverse claim of falsehood."³³ The composer of this prologue clearly expects, yet hopes to prevent negative reactions from the readers of the Latin revelations.

Why, we might ask, would Latin readers perceive this account of the soul's desire for God as scandalous or offensive, especially as it is so firmly grounded in the discourse of both the Psalms and the popular and erotic Song of Songs, promoted and disseminated so widely in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux?³⁴ A major stumbling block appears to have been gender. While one motivation for these modifications was clearly the desire to keep Mechthild's language from exceeding the erotic tone of the biblical books that inspired her, another was the perceived need to explain and qualify Mechthild's position as a *female* messenger of God. Anticipating the objections of educated male clerics presented with an instructional text by an unlearned beguine woman, the writer of the Latin prologue, in what is by this time a trope for holy women's hagiographies, invokes the biblical tradition of holy women prophets:³⁵

Quite often, in fact, almighty God has chosen what is weak in the world to confound what is stronger for its good. [. . .] He, who in the time of the law of Moses mercifully saw fit to perform similar works, now reveals his mysteries to the fragile sex. Because the people of Israel believed Deborah's prophecy, they won freedom from oppression and victory over their enemies. Also, a king, a religious man, was found worthy to gain solace and mercy through the prayer and advice of the prophetess Huldah. So, too, shall

all who write or read this book, if they approach it with pious intent, attain an increase in solace and spiritual grace, as the Lord promises them in the book itself.³⁶

While acting as vessels of divine messages is a quality of prophets generally (male and female), only prophetic women figure here. This should not be particularly surprising when we recall that thirteenth-century clergy were concerned about unauthorized preaching not only by the laity generally but especially by women. In the same way that Eustace of Arras raises Mary Magdalene and St. Catherine as examples of women authorized to speak publicly because of a divine gift from the Holy Spirit, the translator here seeks to remind contemporary readers that the prophetic authorship of a “fragile” female has biblical precedent.³⁷ If that is not enough to alleviate the suspicions of potential readers, the translator adopts and adapts Mechthild’s own denials of authorship, stating that the book’s true author is “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”³⁸ Disregarding the trend among scholastic commentators on the Bible to pay more attention in their prologues to the human author (as efficient cause), the composer of this prologue summarily ignores the human author Mechthild.³⁹ In this way, the translator legitimizes the authenticity (as God’s words) of what Mechthild writes while at the same time effacing her particular agency in writing it. The success of this strategy becomes apparent in the incorporation of Mechthild’s visions of St. Dominic in Dominic’s *vita*, completed between 1296 and 1298 by Dietrich of Apolda, a Dominican in the community at Erfurt. Dietrich mentions neither the gender nor the name of the source, only that God revealed many things about Dominic to a “certain person” and that the revelations were very intimate and true.⁴⁰

Heinrich of Nördlingen and the German Translation

While the Latin transmission attests to the impulse to qualify, if not shroud, female authorship in order to “universalize” the text for a predominantly male readership, the transmission of the complete Middle High German translation (E) shows that, despite Mechthild’s efforts to speak beyond both gender and social position in her book, its promoters understood the vernacular version to be most appropriate for women like her. The absence of explicit justifications of female authorship from the prologue to the German version is explained by this perceived audience. Indeed, it is the negative example that proves the rule forbidding women’s public instruction. As indicated by Heinrich of Nördlingen’s letters, which recommend Mechthild’s book and quote it several times, *The Flowing Light* was meant for reading among confined groups of women.⁴¹ So long as the text was to circulate in an environment removed from the public arena of the parish church or town square, the ban on women’s public speech held. For this reason, female authorship does not emerge in Heinrich’s letters as an explicit problem to be resolved, as it did for the Latin translators.

Despite the fact that more and more courts in the fourteenth century kept their books of land grants and laws in German, and that the German of the eastern central areas would become the standard administrative language by the time of Luther, Mechthild's Low German text had to be translated into High German in order to be understood by the religious nuns and beguines in southern Germany and Switzerland around 1345. As indicated in the letter sending *The Flowing Light* to Margaret Ebner and her sisters in the convent of Maria Medingen, Heinrich of Nördlingen thought the text quite extraordinary generally, and particularly appropriate for women's religious contemplative practices. In addition to remarking on the beauty of the language, he comments on how to prepare for reading it (7 *Veni sancte Spiritus*, 7 *pater noster* and 7 *Ave marias*), on how to read it ("with restraint and not for too long"), and finally what to do if they have trouble understanding it ("the words you don't understand, write down and send them to me and I will Germanize them, for it came to us in a totally foreign German that took us a good two years of industrious work just to begin bringing into our German").⁴² To underscore its value for the religious practice of his cloistered friends, he also quotes *The Flowing Light* as part of his counsel in two other letters to Margaret, hoping that *disz meinenkoszen* (this discourse on love) is brought to the utmost fruition in her and her sisters.⁴³ If Mechthild's book was supposed to be sent by God to all good and bad religious people, we can see here that in Heinrich's hands Mechthild's reach extends primarily to good religious women.

Indeed, Heinrich quite clearly means to encourage the writing of women in his care.⁴⁴ In one letter, he tells Margaret that if there is anything she has not written or has forgotten to write, *das du es mit fleisz schreibest und zesamen samnest bisz an das end ...*" (that you write it with diligence and gather it all together until it is finished).⁴⁵ In the letter recommending *The Flowing Light* to Margaret, Heinrich thanks her for the text (*geschrift*) she had recently sent him, advising her not to stop writing as long as God continues to give her His gift.⁴⁶ Further, Heinrich indicates that the nuns should read the book only three times instead of the nine times recommended in the prologue, for he wants to send it on to the nearby convent of Engelthal, where Margaret's contemporary Christine Ebner (1277–1356—another of Heinrich's spiritual daughters and no relation to Margaret) was recording her mystical revelations.⁴⁷

While the letters clearly demonstrate Heinrich's support of writing by the religious women he knows, they also remind us once again that the authority or legitimacy of devotional books (their status as correct or orthodox) does not derive automatically from their human authors. Accordingly, although Heinrich names the titles of the books he is sharing with the convent at Medingen, he only rarely mentions authors by name. In a letter from 1339, Heinrich tells Margaret that he has sent the *Orologium Sapientiae ze Latin* (Clock of Wisdom in Latin) to the prior at Kaisheim. He further instructs her

to tell this prior to lend the book to her so that she and her sisters can make a copy for their convent.⁴⁸ He does not mention the text's author, Heinrich Seuse (1295–1366), a student of the famous preacher Meister Eckhart and a contemporary of Heinrich of Nördlingen. Seuse was also famous for his religious devotion and for his care of religious women. But Heinrich does indicate that the copy he sent Transmission Lessons to Kaisheim actually belonged to *vatter Tauler*, that is, Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300–1361), another contemporary preacher widely known for his vernacular sermons. Heinrich mentions Tauler frequently in the letters and with great respect. We learn in another letter from 1339 that Tauler had accompanied Heinrich on one of his visits to Medingen and helped him with his pastoral duties at that time.⁴⁹ Heinrich establishes the book's authority by mentioning a man of reputation (by virtue of his office as a preacher) as well as a man the sisters know personally. Clearly, Tauler's ownership of the book lends it more authority in the sisters' eyes than the name of its author.

In 1345, Heinrich instructs Margaret and the other nuns to buy *die drii teil der Sumen sant Thomas des predigers* (the three parts of the Summa of St. Thomas the Preacher).⁵⁰ This St. Thomas is, of course, Thomas Aquinas. He is the only author cited by name in these letters, presumably a tribute to his great renown at the time (Aquinas had only recently been canonized in 1323). When Heinrich refers to another of Aquinas' works later in the same year, he does not name Thomas again, but mentions only the title of the work, *Summa contra gentiles*.⁵¹ In this case, the authority or merit of the books derives from an author who, like Tauler, is well-known because of his office as a scholar and teacher, but Aquinas's authority also stems from the connection to divinity accorded him as a saint.

Although Mechthild's name does appear several times in the Einsiedeln manuscript, Heinrich resorts to other methods to establish Mechthild's authority.⁵² He introduces one quote from *The Flowing Light* with the comment: *also sagent und schribent uns die fründt gotz* (thus say and write the friends of God). For the second Mechthild chapter quoted, he concludes: *diz wart gegeben einer hoch gezogner sel in got* (this was given to a soul exalted in God).⁵³ The composition and material production of the prose is attributed, in the first case, to a plurality. Rather than naming Mechthild, Heinrich cites the "friends of God"—the name used to refer to Heinrich's religious friends in the Basel area—among whom were those who helped to translate Mechthild's book.⁵⁴ In this way, Heinrich grants the authority of authorship to the translators. In the second case, Heinrich attributes authorship to an unnamed soul given the mystic credentials of being drawn up and exalted in God. The words come to the soul while she is exalted; they come from God. We can compare this style of attribution to that in the prologue to *The Flowing Light*. After God's statement that he sends the book to all religious, Mechthild asks Him who has made this book, to which He replies: *Ich han es gemacht* (I have made it). In the context of this and the other

claims made in the book as to its divine authorship, Heinrich can easily claim “that God himself is in it and has revealed himself in this book.”⁵⁵

Heinrich’s appreciation of *The Flowing Light* notwithstanding, his letters reveal a concept of female authorship that, like the Latin translator’s prologue, values the text as divine over its earthly composer. The indifference regarding the earthly author’s name is perhaps not unusual, as is evidenced by the citations to the *Horologium sapientiae* and the *Summa contra gentiles*. But in the former case, Heinrich establishes the book’s authority if not with Seuse’s name, then with Tauler’s. Having met Tauler personally and experienced his authority as a preacher, the nuns can accept the book he owns as authoritative. In the case of Aquinas’s books, his authority comes from his office both as famous theologian and as recently canonized saint. Within this context, Heinrich’s choice not to mention Mechthild by name can be understood as strategic. Women’s public teaching, we remember, was allowable in some quarters if granted by the grace of God’s prophetic gift and also if limited either to private audiences (the family, children) or to an audience of other women. Heinrich thus appropriately adopts the framing device provided by Mechthild’s prologue. Furthermore, the foreword in the Einsiedeln manuscript supplies other information about the writer that would legitimize her publicly aimed speech, namely that she “was a holy virgin both in body and in spirit” just as Eustace of Arras requires for legitimate women teachers.⁵⁶ It is within these parameters that we must understand Heinrich’s comments on Mechthild’s book. He is conforming to convention in using it to teach and instruct other women as well as to encourage them to be divine vessels and write their own books of God. However, in the process he defies the opinions of authorities such as Humbert of Romans or, some time later, Jean Gerson, who would see the circulation of a female-authored theological text as unacceptable regardless of audience. The consequences of his actions, though, are that the book as a whole—that is, as an account of a gifted spiritual woman’s religious life and revelations—circulates in the relative obscurity of confined communities of women. Moreover, while the female audience means that female authorship need not be denied, the primacy of God’s authorship and authority continues to overshadow the human soul through which the book came into the world.

The Einsiedeln manuscript provides additional evidence for Heinrich’s view that *The Flowing Light* should have a role in the pastoral care of religious women. This codex belonged to a contemporary of Heinrich, Margaret of the Golden Ring, who is mentioned in at least two of his letters to Margaret Ebner and who was a member of the “friends of God.”⁵⁷ She bequeathed the Einsiedeln codex to a group of *Waldschwestern* (forest sisters, that is, reclusive beguines) living in a secluded valley in the mountains near Zurich. According to the instructions written onto the first leaf of the manuscript by Margaret’s confessor, the book was to serve all of the houses in the forest—each house was to keep the book for a month and then pass it on

to the next house, a practice of exchange that was to be continued indefinitely, for the book *sol us dem walde niemer kommen* (should never come out of the forest).⁵⁸ The instruction to share the book among the beguine houses could be attributed to insufficient scribal (copying) resources on the part of either Margaret's parish of St. Peter's in Basel or the forest beguines. But it is also suggestive of the way mystical handbooks facilitated the indirect conversation among these houses and thereby the establishment and maintenance of larger textual communities.⁵⁹ Heinrich of Nördlingen expects that the copy he sends to Margaret Ebner in Medingen will be read to the community or passed around within it. He also wants it to be passed around at the convents of Engelthal and Kaisheim. Similarly, Margaret of the Golden Ring's confessor directs her copy to confined groups of female readers in an isolated and, in this case, even remote space. Furthermore, his instruction, like Heinrich's letters, names the book by title (*The light of the Godhead*), but he is mute as to its earthly author.

As late as the sixteenth century, the codex still belonged to the Einsiedeln beguines: a local chaplain writes on the first folio of the manuscript, *Diss Buoch gehört in dass Schwesterhuss zuo Einsidlen* (This book belongs in the sisterhouse of Einsiedeln) and then signs his name (*Anthony Mathiae Caplan zuo Attighausen*). This chaplain also adds a title before the foreword *Von der Offenbarungen einer liebhabenden Seele* (The Revelations of a Loving/Love-Filled Soul) (E., f. 2r), maintaining the anonymity of the human author. Like Heinrich of Nördlingen, then, Margaret of the Golden Ring, her confessor Peter, and the chaplain of Attighausen view the book as best suitable for women's religious communities. Because of this clearly intended audience, there is no need to mitigate or explain the female authorship beyond what is already expressed by the editor in the foreword or by Mechthild in the text itself. Further, the claims for God's authorship coming through an anonymous human soul are reinforced by the men who promote the book among groups of women they know. In this way, they transmit the teachings of Mechthild without danger of reproof from higher authorities, increasing the circulation of the book but also making it anonymous.

Dialogue, Authorship, and the Mystical Handbook

The exchange of books and conversation evident in Heinrich of Nördlingen's letters and in the ownership history of the Einsiedeln manuscript is emblematic of the dialogic exchange that structured devotional life and the texts that promoted it. We can trace the prevalence of this form as a cultural paradigm to historical developments in late medieval religious patterns of devotion. The increasing emphasis in the thirteenth century on *imitatio Christi* and the *vita apostolica* focuses the attention of Christian subjects not only on the sufferings of Christ, but also on Christ's manner of communication with

his followers (His conversations with the apostles and His sermons), a manner that the apostles and those ordained to preach after them were expressly urged to imitate. The liturgy for the mass involves a program of responses from the devout listener, and the divine offices lay out a conversation with God that happens in prayer. The most dialogic book of the vulgate Bible, the Song of Songs, had become increasingly popular since both Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons and the Song itself were translated into the vernacular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁶⁰ Finally, once mendicant preachers make a point of preaching in the vernacular to the laity and are ordered by papal decree to offer spiritual guidance (confession and counsel) to both uncloistered and cloistered religious women, talk and conversation become even more central to the religious education and culture of the thirteenth century.⁶¹

Mystical and visionary texts themselves are thus, not surprisingly, frequently characterized by their dialogic form, if not origin. Elisabeth of Schonau's (1129–1165) visions record dialogues between Elisabeth and an angel. These visionary dialogues were often the result of direct questioning from Elisabeth's brother, Ekbert, who had taken it upon himself to manage and write down his sister's visions.⁶² Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) laid out her theological program in a book length dialogue between "Reason," "the soul," and "Love." Heinrich Seuse's (1295–1366) popular *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* (*Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*) describes his own spiritual path to divine love by means of a dialogue between "the Servant" and "Eternal Wisdom." Mechthild's writings, which fall between Elisabeth's and Marguerite's, also make good and frequent use of the dialogic form. They include dialogues between the soul and God, the Trinity, angels, the senses, and Lady Love, as well as between allegorical representations of concepts, such as in a conversation reported between *bekantnisse* (revelation/knowledge) and *das gewissen* (conscience) (VII, 17). Further, some of the chapters in later parts of the book allude to Mechthild's ongoing conversations or exchanges with other beguines, with the readers of her book, both real and imagined, and with her confessors.

This characteristic of mystical writing has, of course, not gone unnoticed by scholars. Walter Haug explores how the mystical dialogue in Mechthild's text opens the way to a renewed mystical encounter even though, as speech, it cannot represent or actualize the encounter itself.⁶³ Michel de Certeau describes mystic speech as "the anti-Babel, the quest for a common speech after its breakdown, the invention of a language of 'God' or 'of the angels' that would compensate for the dispersal of human languages."⁶⁴ Bernard McGinn takes his cue from his subject matter as he suggests that the concept of an "overheard conversation" is the best way to approach the issue of relations between religious men and women at this time.⁶⁵

While the dominant form in *The Flowing Light* is dialogue, the book also facilitated dialogue with and among its medieval readers, the conversation we "overhear" when we examine devotional anthologies. Indeed, the transmission

of Mechthild's book tells us that the act of reading can itself be conceived of as part of a dialogue. For example, the Einsiedeln manuscript is rich in marginalia, indicating numerous lively readings of (or conversations with) the book. Of the six identifiable scripts evident in the marginalia, one is from the main hand of the manuscript, another is contemporary, and two are from the fifteenth century. Their remarks range from brief summaries or key words relating to the content, quotes from Latin texts like the Roman Breviary, cross-references to other chapters of the book, and notational imperatives like *merke* (take note), *scrib* (write), *cessa* (stop), *glosa* (gloss), *hoer* (listen).⁶⁶ These readers thus left evidence of their own conversations with the book as they read, brought different parts of the book into dialogue with one another in their cross-referencing, and facilitated the use of the book in dialogues with others (see Figure 1).

The transmission of *The Flowing Light* in different manuscripts and forms also encourages specific dialogues with specific audiences. By translating and reshaping Mechthild's book for a learned, male Latinate audience, the Dominicans at Halle were hoping to help it speak to a new and larger readership. Similarly, Heinrich of Nördlingen sent *The Flowing Light* to women's communities so that the text could talk to them. If the Latin and High German translations thus seem to imply a conceptual link between Latin and male audiences as opposed to vernacular and female audiences, the three manuscripts I turn to now (Würzburg, Budapest, and Colmar) bear witness to Latin and German writings being addressed to mixed audiences.⁶⁷ Consisting of both laity and the clergy, as well as men and women, the audiences these mystical handbooks address demonstrate the inadequacy of the assumption that vernacular religious books are women's books. But these mystical handbooks tell us more than that the relationship between gender and language is complex. They illustrate that in the world of late medieval vernacular theology, Latin and vernacular religious cultures are themselves in frequent dialogue, in accordance with the dominant cultural paradigm of the mystical dialogue between the soul and God. The Würzburg manuscript (W) gathers together both Latin and German texts. Not only does a scribe bind *The Flowing Light* excerpts together with Latin grammatical treatises and sermon outlines, but also the composers of the Mechthild selection create series of macaronic texts, accenting and punctuating the German excerpts with citations from Latin scripture, hymns, and liturgy.⁶⁸ The Budapest manuscript (B) also attests to an exchange between German and Latin: it includes not only Heinrich Seuse's *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, but also a German translation of one chapter (II, 7) from Seuse's Latin version of this book (the *Horologium sapientiae*). The Colmar manuscript (C) is all in German and addresses a male audience, arguably of Dominican friars, on matters relating to the interactions between friars and the religious women under their supervision. It uses the Mechthild selections specifically to praise the Dominican order and to address both the inner lives of Dominican friars and

their conversations with the world, that is, as purveyors of counsel.

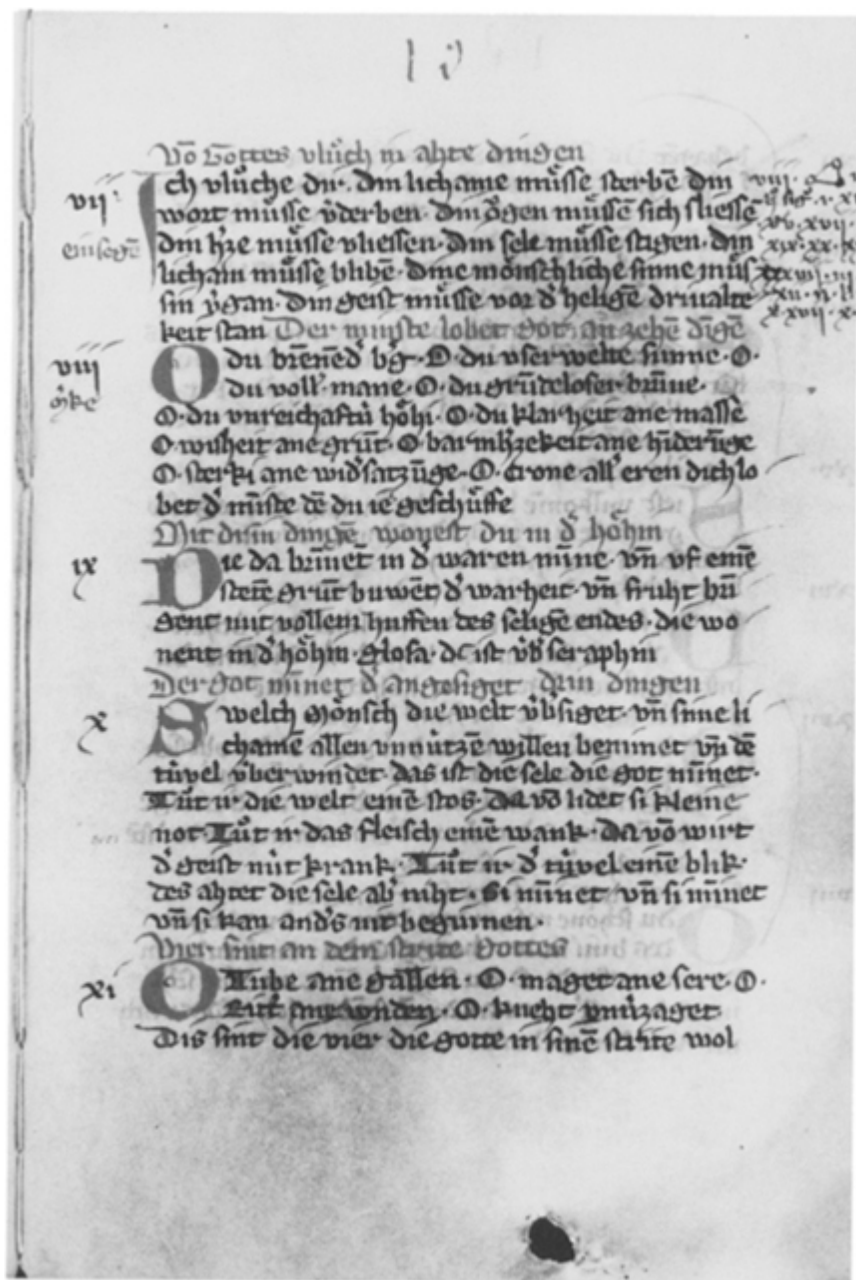


Figure 1. Folio 7r of Msc. 277, Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek.

These three manuscripts thus enable us to see the dynamism and vitality of a medieval religious practice based on the productive, even creative potential of conversation, even if that conversation occurs in two languages and is

initiated in a pastoral context (confession, sermon). Our continued pursuit of the reasons for Mechthild's fall into obscurity thus exposes dynamic intertextual conversations in which authorship in the modern sense of the term — the production of “original” writing (that is, rebellious, radical, and new, though still embedded in tradition)—is no longer the direct result of divine inspiration but rather of what happens when a multitude of divinely inspired texts are made to interact.

The consequence of this dialogic composition was not so much a loss as a diffusion of authorial responsibility among individual texts. Authorial responsibility for the new compositions (compilations) theoretically lies with the compilers, but they remain unnamed.⁶⁹ Named authors are few and thus have little to do with establishing *auctoritas*, both for male-authored and female-authored mystical writings. In these three books, the selections gain authority by association with other words of or from God (Würzburg, Budapest), or with saints (Colmar). The manuscripts thus force us to revise what authorship means in their contexts. In all three cases, authorship perceived as literary creation that is also orthodox (true in the religious sense) is the realm of God, while humans are left with the authorship of production—they are the mediators of God's words and work in the world. Mechthild is a mediator as are the scribes who use her work. In contrast to Mechthild's internal and personal dialogue with God, however, the scribes of these compilations participate in a *textual* dialogue by copying texts in which God speaks, and which are delivered to earth by His various messengers: prophets, apostles, saints, *auctores*, priests, preachers, and holy women. Mechthild's writings have an integral place in these conversations and in the fascinating tradition they construct. The legacy of this tradition for its medieval audiences was nothing less than the glory of divine love. In fulfilling her mission to teach all religious people about this glory, then, Mechthild's writings help to establish a tradition that has no place for either her or any other author's name.

THE WÜRZBURG MANUSCRIPT: AUTHORIZING DIALOGUES

Still held by the library of the Franciscan monastery in Würzburg (founded 1221), this codex was bound in the fifteenth century. It consists of four parts dating from the second half of the fourteenth century; one part offers the selection of Mechthild's writings. Discovered and described by Wilhelm Schleussner in the late 1920s, the details presented us by the codex allude to various different moments of composing, writing, and compilation.⁷⁰ For this reason, the codex implies a variety of functions as well as a concept of authorship in which the names of earthly authors bear little weight. Rather than rely on the names of well-known scholars like Thomas Aquinas or authorize an unschooled religious woman author as a prophet, the scribes of

the Würzburg compilation establish authority by inclusion and association, a practice that has a dialogic effect. The mediator/author of the Mechthild compilation not only participates in a dialogue with the divine in the act of compiling but also encourages this dialogue in his readers. Although often limited by the availability of exemplars, compilers had to ensure the authority/orthodoxy of the writings they included because of the education or edification agenda implied by devotional handbooks. Furthermore, selecting only portions of Mechthild's writings and placing them in dialogue with sacred texts reveals a strong interest in the control of meaning. Exerting this control not only establishes Mechthild's writings as sacred but also highlights the scribes' productive transmission of the text as a form of authorship in its own right.⁷¹

Before turning to the Mechthild selection, a brief description of the contents will demonstrate not only the unusual context in which Mechthild's writings appear in the bound manuscript (Latin grammar tracts and sermon outlines) but also the dynamic history of each part of the manuscript before being bound. Further, the attitude toward text and authorship displayed in these mini-transmissions gives us a material understanding of how the very transmission of Mechthild's writings on paper made them vulnerable to damage and loss.

In the case of manuscripts of this type—compilation manuscripts, also referred to as miscellanies—there is always a fair chance that the two principle reasons for putting the codex together were (1) availability of texts and (2) a desire to preserve them from loss or damage through use. However, as Ralph Hanna argues, vernacular compilations had *various* motivations, of which the random inclusion of a text simply because it was available at the time of compilation is only one.⁷² Medieval scribes were undoubtedly constrained by what Hanna calls “exemplar poverty,” but one can also discern evidence of other organizational motivations such as theme and function, as well as other constraining factors, such as material resources, political situation, and audience.⁷³ It is also important to remember that compilation manuscripts were generally the product of special orders, whether by others or by the scribes themselves for personal use.⁷⁴ This aspect, too, could act as a constraint on the compilation. Whether a collection has intellectual motivations or not, however, once it is produced, it creates and asserts a composite meaning. Indeed, as Hanna argues, compilations “testify to highly individualistic canon-creating efforts by individuals variously inserted into discrete and fragmented social positions.”⁷⁵ To understand these collaboratively made “individual canons,” particularly as they relate to the textual authority and canonicity of Mechthild's *The Flowing Light*, the compilations must be read seriously and closely. The analyses that follow attempt to perform such a reading.

The Würzburg codex, though not unusual in bearing witness to a complex textual history, presents us with one of the most hybrid compilations in the

Mechthild transmission. Through quire layout, arrangement, watermarks and type of script, Hans Neumann identifies four distinct parts (booklets), each with a slightly different date (see Appendix B).⁷⁶ Part I (thirty-nine folios) contains five Latin tracts on points of grammar and a popular, and frequently copied collection of aphoristic sayings placed in the mouths of classical authors such as Horace, Lucan, Ovid, Cato, Macrobius, Plato, Pythagoras, and Galen. Part II (twenty-two folios) contains sixty-nine chapters from the Middle High German version of *The Flowing Light*, of which roughly half are transmitted only partially and sometimes edited. Part III (around sixty folios) reproduces a collection of Latin sermons on the saints that has been identified as the work of Peregrinus von Oppeln. Part IV (three folios) contains fragments of two other manuscripts: an unidentified university sermon and a group of university sermon outlines for the Sundays around Pentecost.

“Exemplar poverty” and a resulting desire to preserve these texts was no doubt one of the motivations for binding this manuscript in the fifteenth century. But, as Vincent Gillespie has noted for the English context, clerics were increasingly using the vernacular for pastoral manuals and handbooks in this period. He attributes this trend not only to expanding lay audiences but also to the presence of less literate members of the clerical ranks.⁷⁷ A similar motivation could also be behind the assembly of Latin grammar tracts with sermon outlines and a German macaronic anthology in the Würzburg manuscript. What is certain, however, is that all the pieces that make up this codex attest to the dynamic life of texts and the blur of “makers” (composers, copiers, compilers, binders) surrounding them. In Part I, for example, Neumann identifies three distinct handwritings, or “hands.” The section consists of five quires of four folios each. While the first page of this booklet is missing, the first text is complete, which suggests that this set of leaves existed for enough time as a blank booklet to lose a page. The five quires were then used by the main hand of this section (Hand 1) for a collection of four grammatical tracts. After the third tract, Hand 1 leaves the last one and one half pages blank (W, f. 31^{r-v}), preferring instead to begin the fourth tract on the first page of the last quire (W, f. 32^r). This suggests that the fifth quire might have been added later or that Part I of the codex had an early life as a cluster of four quires to which a fifth was later added. On the space left after the third and fourth grammar texts respectively (W, f. 31^{rb}–31^{vb}; 38^{ra}–39^{vb}), two other later hands made additions. Hand 2 adds the collection of sayings, veering away from the grammatical interests of Hand 1, while Hand 3 adds a fifth grammar tract, adhering to the earlier subject matter. Perhaps Hand 2 adds the sayings to supply examples of good Latin for those attempting to learn Latin grammar. Taking a different tack, Hand 3 augments the textbook-like content, including yet another tract on a grammatical principle, this time one on nouns. These particulars confirm that already before it became part of the Würzburg codex, Part I of the manuscript had an active life as a booklet, constructed by and circulating among at least three people, each of whom had

slightly different ideas for its use.⁷⁸

The other parts of the codex also circulated freely before being bound, thereby becoming vulnerable to loss and augmentation. The collection of sermons on the saints, which makes up Part III, for example, lacks its beginning and its conclusion. Further, Neumann finds that a quire of six leaves has been cut out. Part IV of the codex is made up of three leaves, which are probably the remains of two different manuscripts that have been glued together and stuck into a blank sexternio (quire with six leaves) that was also excised later. Part II — the selection from Mechthild's book—demonstrates an even more dynamic prebinding history. A large ink spot on the first page of the section (W, f. 40^r) and usage marks (smudges) on the last page (W, f 62^v) indicate that this cluster of three quires existed and was used for a significant period of time before being bound. The age of the paper and the dating of the handwriting (1350–1375) in contrast to the binding, which is fifteenth century, confirm this assertion. There are three leaves missing from the third quire of this cluster, but there is no evidence of their having been cut out of the bound manuscript as is the case with the missing leaves in Parts III and IV. Indeed, as Schleussner discovered upon closer examination, the folios in Part II were clearly bound together out of order (see Appendix B).⁷⁹

Part II attests to three different discernible stages of existence: (1) the section had a life as it was originally written down by the fourteenth-century hand of a cleric, around which time it lost the first three pages and acquired at least some of the usage marks on the last page; (2) a second life as a booklet in reshuffled order when it got the ink spot and usage marks on its new first page; and (3) a third life as part of the bound book. Clearly, the practices of booklet construction and use displayed here, practices that were quite common throughout Europe, would not bode well for the preservation of any text in the form favored by today's literary culture, that is, with authorial attribution and some state of completeness. The transmission of Mechthild's text in a textual culture so accustomed to material loss of textual coherency thus plays a significant role in the gradual "loss" of Mechthild's name. Her writings in the Würzburg compilation appear unattributed, but we must remember that the booklet in which they were first collected lost its initial three pages—pages that could have named Mechthild and the title of her book. Nevertheless, the booklet as it has survived in the codex lacks a Mechthild attribution. The details of the manuscript's material history demonstrate that the absence of Mechthild's name might have had more to do with the tenuous materiality of medieval books than with a problem with Mechthild's female authorship.

Because the entire manuscript contains only one explicit attribution of authorship, we might speculate that the first three pages of Part II held no attribution either. However, as we examine this section in more detail, we see that the association of a text with an author is plainly beside the point. What is important is the writings' sacred and orthodox meaning as constructed by

means of the interrelation between the excerpts brought together by the makers of Part II. This section reveals the way two discourses and their respective languages become the building blocks for something new. The vernacular and dialogic discourse of mystical contemplation as exemplified in excerpts from Mechthild's writings comes into an increasingly creative dialogue with the Latin discourses of liturgy, worship, and scripture. The questions of legitimacy that accompany a text about God are handled by other means than those used by the Latin translators or by Heinrich of Nördlingen. The legitimacy of the writings (their status as holy words) is established by virtue of the context in which they are put.

Whoever originally made the compilation that comprises Part II of the codex felt as the Latin translators did, that the writings were important and beautiful primarily because they came from God and delivered His truth. While the Latin editors translated as much of the book as they had at that point (Books I through VI) and added a prologue that responded to the problem of female authorship, the compiler of this section takes a different approach. He gives new Latin titles (taken primarily from scripture) to most of the chapters he chooses and into those chapters he inserts more Latin quotes from the Bible, hymns, and the Breviary. The compilation thus not only records a mystical dialogue as words (the German excerpts) but also enacts it symbolically insofar as the relationship between the German and the Latin on the page can be seen as representing the conversation between the earthly soul (vernacular) and the divine lover (Latin).

To demonstrate how this dialogue unfolds, I now turn to Part II in its original order. As Neumann and Kornrumpf have established, the aging cleric responsible for the Mechthild section in the Würzburg manuscript copied from a source that had already collected the Mechthild chapters with the Latin titles and references.⁸⁰ The source for this initial selection was a copy of the Middle High German translation complete with the German chapter headings and marginalia we know from E, some of which are retained in this compilation. Most of the headings in W, however, are abbreviated quotes from sacred Latin texts. For example, the first nine chapter headings in the Mechthild selection are:

1. *Tu solus peregrinus in [Jerusalem]* (Luke 24: 18; Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem)
2. *Veni electa mea et ponam in te tronum meum* (used in abbreviated form for two other chapters, a response from the Roman Breviary *Commune virginum*: Come, my chosen one, and I shall set my throne in you)⁸¹
3. *Surge propera amica mea, veni de Libano* (Song 2: 10; Arise swiftly, my friend, come from Lebanon)
4. *Mane orietur stella ex Jacob* (Num. 24: 17; There shall come a star out of Jacob);

5. *Ego sum lux mundi, qui sequitur . . .* (John 8: 12; I am the light of the world, he who follows . . .)
6. *Laus angelorum. Laudate deum* (Ps. 148: 2; Praise of Angels, Praise God)
7. *Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, quia manus domini tetigit* (Job 19: 21; Have pity on me, have pity on me, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me)
8. *Te deum laudamus* (Hymn; We praise you, God)
9. *Ut cognoscamus in terra viam tuam* (Ps. 66: 3; That we may know your way on earth)⁸²

Already in the first three folios of the Mechthild section (W, f. 49,50, and 58) we see quotations from the New Testament, the Old Testament, hymns, and the liturgy from the divine offices.

Whereas the German titles of the Einsiedeln manuscript are descriptive at best, the Latin titles in W give the reader an exegetical context within which to understand the section. Taking the first Latin heading, *tu solus peregrinus*, as an example, we find that in the Einsiedeln version of this chapter (VI, 33) the header states *Von dem scharpfen capittel, da der bilgerin zuo kam, der schein ein gros herre* (on the strict chapter meeting, to which the pilgrim came, who turned out to be a great lord). True to this promise, what follows describes a person (*mensch*) who holds a strict chapter meeting in his heart in order to chastise and cleanse it of all sin.⁸³ Into this chapter meeting comes Christ dressed as a pilgrim. The person's spirit recognizes the pilgrim immediately as Christ and asks him where he has come from. Christ answers that he has come from Jerusalem where he suffered greatly. The person thanks Christ, who then crowns the person with the crown of poverty, shame, and suffering, a crown decorated with the image of Christ. The compilers clearly recognize in this vision a variation on an episode from the Gospels known as the "journey [or road] to Emmaus" and accordingly cite Luke's version of the episode with the title, *Tu solus peregrinus*. On the third day after Christ's death, still doubting the rumor that Christ has risen and is alive, two apostles walk to a town some distance from Jerusalem and talk about what has happened. Jesus walks with them, asking them of what they speak. They do not recognize him and in response to his question, one of them, Cleophas, says: "Tu solus peregrinus es in Hierusalem et non cognovisti quae facta sunt in ilia his diebus?" (Luke 24: 18; Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem and hast not known the things that have been done there in these days?). Upon further inquiry, each of the two apostles tells Christ his own story. In the chapter from *The Flowing Light*, Christ tells his story directly to the "mensch" of the vision. It seems clear that the vision itself is in dialogue with the scriptural version of the story even as the person in the vision is literally in a dialogue with Christ. If Christ is the Word incarnate, then the representation or imagining of a person speaking to Christ in the flesh can be understood as

an allegorical understanding of the individual's relationship to the Bible and scripture. The editors of the Mechthild excerpts in the Würzburg codex make this understanding explicit by using a quote from the scriptural episode as the title of the chapter.

This dialogic relationship between the discourse of sacred Latin texts and Mechthild's poetry and prose intensifies as the collection proceeds. Between half and two thirds of the way through Part II of the Würzburg manuscript, the Latin additions become more frequent and have a more significant function than mere signposting. Indeed, the compilers become increasingly creative, combining excerpts from different chapters and inserting more and more Latin phrases. Whereas in the early part of the section, the Latin insertions frame and legitimize the vernacular writings through a scriptural referent, in the last half of the selection, they become integrated directly into the German texts. They no longer merely suggest that the German texts, like the religious person, should be in dialogue with scripture, rather they literally make that dialogue explicit on the page. For example, Chapter 29 of Book I in E begins: "Vide me sponsa! Sich, wie schoene min ovgen sint" (Look at me bride! Behold how beautiful are my eyes). The compilers of W take the *Vide me sponsa* allusion to the Song of Songs and reframe it using Latin quotations from Luke (the layout of the lines here, except for the inserted English translations and attributions, corresponds to that on folio 40V on which this poem appears):

*Vide me sponsa, videte manus
meas et pedes meas [sic] quia ego ipse sum* (Luke 24: 39)
Sich wy shone min ogin sin
contemplantur bonos et malos (Prov. 15: 3)

(Look at me bride, see my hands and feet, that it is I myself. See how beautiful are my eyes; they behold the good and the evil)

wi recht min munt ist *quia veritatem
docuit et operibus adimpleuit quia cepit
Jesus facere et implere* ("quia . . . implere" Acts 1:1)

(how just my mouth is; for He taught the truth and fulfilled it in good works, because Jesus began to do and to perform)

wy furich min herze ist *maio rem
karitatem* (John 15: 13)⁸⁴

(how fiery my heart is; greater love)

wy geringe min hende sint *manum
suam aperuit inopi et manum suam
extendit ad pauperem* (Prov. 31: 20)

(how agile my hands are; He hath opened His hand to the needy and extended His hand to the poor)

wy snel mine fuze sint *veloces*
pedes ad effundendum sangwinem (Rom 3: 15)

(how swift my feet are; swift feet to the shedding of blood)

Du solt gemartirt werde *Cristus*
passus est pronobis vobis relinqwens ex[emplum] (1 Peter 2: 21)

(You shall be martyred; Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example)

The new Latin opening strongly suggests that the first line of German refers to the resurrected Christ of the Luke chapter—that is, the Christ who has been through the passion and who thus elicits both compassion at the pain He suffered and joy at what He has accomplished through that suffering and return. The German deviates slightly from the scriptural pattern offered by Luke, however. While Luke’s Christ wants the apostles to take note of His hands and feet, Mechthild’s Christ draws attention to the beauty of His eyes and speaks to a “bride.” Mechthild had the lover of the Song of Songs in mind here: “How beautiful art thou. . . . Thy eyes are doves’ eyes” (Song of Songs 4: 1). However, the Latin phrase following the German line in W realigns the image with Luke, or with a postresurrection Christ. The reference here is to a verse from Proverbs which reads in its entirety: “The eyes of the Lord in every place behold the good and the evil.” The beautiful eyes are thus not the eyes of a lover but rather the eyes that will judge souls at the last judgment, able to discern good and evil and thereby make judgments on who is to enter heaven.

Just as the German poem continues to follow the “look at my *x*” pattern to its conclusion, the Latin responses continue to offer glosses; some are direct quotations, others not. The responses thus perform a kind of instant exegesis on Mechthild’s poetry: (German) Jesus’ mouth is just because (Latin) He used it to teach and perform good works; (German) His heart is fiery because (Latin) He laid down His life for his friends; (German) His hands are able because (Latin) He opened them up to the poor, and so on. In the final exchange, the recommendation that the reader or listener should be martyred leads to the Latin response: “Christ suffered for you leaving you an example.” The part of the verse from the epistles of St. Peter left out here reads “that you should follow his steps.” Because what follows in German are instructions for how to walk the stations of Christ’s passion, the biblical passage is especially appropriate. If the German line can be seen to make the suggestion, the Latin response clarifies, confirms, and makes explicit how the German should be understood. It gives it a controlling context. Moreover, it lends legitimacy to the writings, for glossing of this nature is generally reserved for the Bible or classical *auctores*.

On the next folio, we find another example of the compilers’ efforts to recast Mechthild’s writings for new purposes (W, f. 42_{r-v}). Instead of one chapter being augmented with Latin phrases having an exegetical function, we

see here the creation of new compositions (on the subject of heaven), using short excerpts from three lengthy chapters in the source. The first text of the group is an excerpt from Mechthild's Book II. The excerpt (II, 19: 44–70) receives the Latin title *de triplici celo*. Referring to the third heaven to which Paul was sent in a vision (2 Cor. 12: 2), the excerpt recounts a dialogue between “Lady Soul” and “Lady Knowledge” in which all three heavens are described. The second text takes six lines from the source (III, I: 141–146) that list the nine choirs of angels in heaven according to what virtues each choir contains or represents. This excerpt, building the second part of the text group on heaven, reads as follows (I list all the choirs and their qualities here because they become important in the third text of the group):

Von den IX chor der engel.
 In dem erstin core ist di lustlicheit,
 In dem andern die samftmuticheit,
 In dem drittin die minneclicheit,
 Indem firden suezicheit,
 Indem fvnften vrolicheit,
 Indem sechstin edele geruch,
 Indem sibenden reicheit,
 Indem achtin wirdicheit,
 Indem nundin das minnin brennen.⁸⁵

In the first choir is happiness/enjoyment, in the second gentleness/peacefulness, in the third lovingness, in the fourth sweetness, in the fifth happiness/delight, in the sixth noble fragrance, in the seventh wealth/power, in the eighth worthiness, in the ninth the burning of love.

Following this list and a concluding set of Latin virtues paired with German humility formulas,⁸⁶ the third text of the group lifts three lines from still another chapter in the source and recasts them as a macaronic poem of praise, titled *Laus angelorum* (Praise of Angels). This crowning text to the triptych on heaven exemplifies the way the compilers mix excerpts from *The Flowing Light* and sacred Latin language to form a unique composition. To demonstrate the compilers' changes, I reproduce first the three lines taken from the source: “Alsust lobent si die nun koere an nún tugenden: ‘Wir loben dich an diner rúwe, an dinem guoten willen, an diner warheit, an diner wisheit, an dinem suessen jamer, an dinem willigen armuete, an diner starkheit, an diner gerehtekeit’” (II, 20: 25–28; Thus they praise the nine choirs for nine virtues: ‘We praise you for your restfulness, for your good will, for your truth, for your wisdom, for your sweet sorrow, for your willing poverty, for your strength, for your righteousness’). The scribes then add two types of references—(1) a repeated Latin clarifying phrase combined with (2) a series of German adverbs:

Wir lobin dich andinir ruwe
quo ad coniugaciones [sic] senftmueltlich

wir lobin dich an dinem gutin willin
quo ad viduas lustlich
wir lobin dich andinir warin chusheit,
quo ad virgines minneclich

Wir loben dich an dinem suzsîn iamir
quo ad milites suezeclich
wir loben dich andinir starkeit
quo ad sacerdotes frolich
wir loben dich an dinem willigin armuet
quo ad episcopos richlich

Wir lobin dich an dinir gerechticheit
quo an religiosos [sic] odir edilgeruch
In odorem unguentorum tuorum currimus adolescens etc.
Wir loben dich an dinir wizheit
quo ad doctores wirdiclich
Wir loben dich an der minne gotis kuniglich
quo ad perfectos mit allen zechin der minne
quia exhibicio operis probacio dileccionis [my underlining] (See Figure 2.)

We praise you for your restfulness / with regard to the marriages [probably meant to refer to “married people”] peacefully / we praise you for your good will / with regard to widows happily/ we praise you for your true chastity / with respect to virgins lovingly/ we praise you for your sweet lament / with respect to soldiers sweetly / we praise you for your strength/ with respect to priests happily / we praise you for your willing poverty / with respect to bishops richly / we praise you for your righteousness / with respect to the religious or noble fragrance/ we run to the scent of your ointments the youth and so on / we praise you for your wisdom / with respect to teachers worthily / we praise you for your love of God kingly / with respect to the (religiously) perfect with all the signs of love / for the performance of good works is the proof of love.

The scribes take the nouns from the list of the nine choirs that precedes this poem in the manuscript and add them as adverbs (with the exception of *edilgeruch*) at the end of each line of praise. The *quoad* phrases tell the reader which group of individuals is being recognized and for which virtue. The connection the adverbs establish to the previous chapter about the nine choirs then allows us to realize that each choir stands not only for a particular virtue but also for a particular and corresponding social group.⁸⁷ Indeed, these groupings reflect the distinctions among *ordines*, or walks of life made in the *sermones ad status*, sermons written for specific segments of the listening audience with corresponding specific, profession-related exempla and counsel.⁸⁸

The reader will also notice a more lengthy Latin addition after the mention of the noble fragrance, a reference that required a more elaborate explication, which is supplied in the form of a loose quote from the Song (1: 2–3). This

verse reads in the Vulgate: “Smelling sweet of the best ointments. Thy name is as oil poured out: therefore young maidens (*adulescentulae*) have loved thee. Draw me: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments.” The *edilgeruch* (noble fragrance) clearly reminds the compilers of this verse, prompting the “shorthand” citation: “we run to the scent of your ointments, the youth.”⁸⁹ Whereas in the *Vide me sponsa!* chapter the compilers direct the reader’s interpretation away from the lovers in the Song, in *Laus angelorum* they feel compelled to explain the “noble fragrance” in reference to the Song, in this case, to the love of youthful maidens for the sweet smelling lover. Because the phrase supplied corresponds syntactically to the German portions of the poem, (we praise :: we run), we can surmise that the compilers suggest an alternative allegorical meaning of the Song. Perhaps they meant to liken the *religiosi* to those who are running, and the scent of the ointments to the righteousness of the preceding line. The religious should be praised because they are always running towards righteousness (the noble fragrance). In this way, they explain the formal aberration of *edilgeruch* (it is not an adverb) by suggesting an allegorical meaning of the parallel scriptural passage.

raised by the main Latin and German translations. The many different incarnations of this codex before being bound, as well as its bilingual composition, make it difficult to identify only one function or audience for the book. Neumann surmises that the intended audience consisted of members of monastic or cloistered communities who could understand Latin.⁹⁰ While he acknowledges the possibility that such an audience could be both male and female, he thinks a female audience of listeners was more likely. Neumann does not explain what precisely brings him to this conclusion, since he himself argues, and rightly so, that “bride-mystical images ... are of course not limited to nunneries and beguinages.”⁹¹ Indeed, my reading of the heaven triptych suggests that the way the compilers reshape Mechthild’s writings, placing them in a dialogue with sacred Latin utterances in order to legitimize them and to control their meaning, implies an audience of both men and women of both the clergy and the laity. The effort to which the scribe goes to establish the connection between the virtues in each heaven and the types of people who should be there underscores this point. Some of these groups are male and clerical (*doctores, sacerdotes, episcopos*), some are female (*virgines, viduas*), and some are mixed (*coniugaciones, religiosi, perfectos*). This list indicates that the message of the compilation has relevance for a variety of audiences. The retitled, reordered, and edited chapters are not simply an account of an individual’s personal mystical experience and, as Neumann suggests, they could be read by anyone capable of reading both languages (this includes most but not all priests, preachers, and monks, as well as many nuns and religious women). Further, many of the Latin phrases would have been familiar to those who could not read Latin but who were familiar with commonly quoted religious sayings—lay religious such as the beguines or lay brothers, or nobles who were familiar with the Latin Psalter, other popular books of the Bible, and the liturgy but who were not trained in theology.⁹² Finally, because of the dialogic structure, someone who could not understand Latin could still benefit from hearing the selection, for the German would serve to explain the Latin phrase, even as the Latin phrase situates the German within a sacred context. The Würzburg selection could have been productively listened to by anyone.

The inclusion of the Mechthild section with the sermon collections and Latin grammatical texts connects the book to an institutional framework of (male) positions of authority. This suggests further that the codex was primarily *used* by friars or priests, but that its instruction was probably *heard* by mixed audiences—Neumann was not wrong to assume listeners as an audience — especially because the Latin quotes come from frequently cited and most likely widely known biblical or liturgical passages. The codex seems meant to be read by one individual at a time (Latin instruction, primer of mystical meditation, sermon outlines), as well as to be spoken to other individuals and groups (in chapter meetings, in confession, in sermons). It thus facilitates a dialogue between the soul of the reader and the sacred Word

(God) as well as between the friar and his potential audiences. This mixture explains the unusual legitimization strategies as well as the relative lack of authorial attributions in the book as a whole.

Even in this much-changed incarnation, then, the compilers use Mechthild's writings according to the mission first articulated for them — that is, for the spiritual edification of all religious people. Yet, the paradox of this "success" is that her role as the *liebhabende Seele* (loving soul) who set the words onto the page does not warrant mentioning. As we have seen, this lack of attribution is not necessarily the fault of the fifteenth-century binder. The Würzburg codex makes clear that the circulation of booklets prior to binding led to lost, jumbled, and even damaged pages. It is possible that an attribution to Mechthild's book did exist, but because the first three pages of that section were lost, we will never know. However, the rest of the Mechthild section as well as attribution patterns in the rest of the manuscript indicate that attributions of authorship are not essential for establishing the legitimacy and authority of the selected writings. Indeed, an alternative understanding of authorship operates to establish legitimacy by association and by creative editing. Further, the relationship between Latin and vernacular, sacred and mystical words operates as a legitimizing force precisely because it resembles the dialogic quality of increasingly popular mystical religious practices. If Mechthild hoped that her readers would, like her, be able to relate personally to a loving divinity, the productive transmission of her writings in the Würzburg codex promotes this conversation literally, as her texts are mingled in a dialogue with God's institutionally approved Latin words. If named authorship and thus Mechthild's fame might appear to be the unwitting loser in this situation, authorship itself carries on, but in a different form—compilation. Authorship is thus both lost and newly imagined as a result of a religious conversation Mechthild's revelations helped to initiate.

THE BUDAPEST MANUSCRIPT: AUTHOR-FUNCTIONS

The importance of dialogue in the construction of mystical handbooks can also be seen in the Budapest manuscript. Dating from 1416, the manuscript consists of three distinct parts: I—Heinrich Seuse's *Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit* (*Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*) in its complete form;⁹³ II—Marquard von Lindau's *Treatise on the Eucharist* in one of its longer versions;⁹⁴ and III—Mechthild von Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light* (see Appendix C for a complete list of contents).⁹⁵ All three of these texts are written primarily in dialogue form—in Seuse's text, between "the Servant" and "Eternal Wisdom;" in Marquard's text, between a master and a youth; and in the Mechthild selections, between the soul and God. The relationships between the different texts and their readers as indicated by the physical evidence of the manuscript are dialogic on a number of levels. Part I includes

not only the entire German version of Seuse's extremely popular book but also a German translation of a chapter from the Latin version, although the scribe broke off before he completed it. Like W, then, this manuscript bears witness to a dialogue between Latin and German, though only implicitly. The Eucharist treatise displays marginalia that attest to a dialogue between what the master and youth discuss on the page and a contemporary reader. Because Seuse's book and the Mechthild sections were copied by the same scribe (Fridericus Pellengriesser) and within two weeks of each other, it seems safe to assume that they were meant to be transmitted together, and therefore placed in dialogue with one another. Confirming this assumption is the handwriting of the few marginalia written in the Seuse section, which matches that of a prayer added at the end of the Mechthild selection. Finally, the compiler of the Mechthild selection (who put together Pellengriesser's source manuscript)⁹⁶ created a selection that privileges dialogues between the soul and God; yet, although he excerpts widely from *The Flowing Light*, he copies the selection as one text (there are no chapter titles or breaks). Further, he inserts a brief passage from a related chapter into one of the other chapters he copies and adds lines of his own making to another.⁹⁷ This composition thus encourages an internal dialogue in the reader or listener even though it does not signal the dialogue formally or visibly on the page.

With regard to the Würzburg manuscript, I argued that the complexity of the intertextual conversation at work in the Mechthild selection suggested a different understanding of authorship in which compiling and editing resulted in new compositions with new meanings and in which authors' names are of little importance. The reason for this lack of emphasis on named authorship, I argued, was the primacy of the authorship of God. In such a textual and cultural context, the dissociation of Mechthild's name from her book results from her inclusion, not exclusion from a newly developing tradition of compilations that teach or demonstrate the mystical dialogue between the soul and God. However, the Budapest manuscript, while it, too, attests to the importance of the mystical dialogue in its composition, raises puzzling questions about the understanding and function of authorship in this new tradition. None of the texts included in this compilation are attributed by name to the authors who composed them; indeed, these identifications were made by modern scholars in the late 1960s.⁹⁸ Are we to infer that the compilers and scribes here were as uninterested in earthly authorship (male or female) as a legitimating factor in their production process as the Würzburg scribes? If extant manuscripts can be read as indicators of popularity, how do we make sense of Seuse's anonymity in B in light of the immense popularity of his work in the Middle Ages? In German libraries alone, Georg Hofmann counts 122 German manuscripts that transcribe Seuse's *Little Book* (he counts both the German *Büchlein* and German translations of the *Horologium sapientiae*) and fifty-nine in the libraries of other European countries while only three of these manuscripts name Seuse.⁹⁹ The Eucharist treatise by Marquard von

Lindau was also relatively popular (fifty-six manuscripts not including B),¹⁰⁰ yet the scribe of this part (or the scribe of his source) chooses not to mention Marquard by name. Do we read these facts to mean that both scribes and readers already knew the composers of these books by name and for this reason did not proclaim their authorship, or that they simply did not care about earthly authors' names, as we have seen before, because the books conveyed the words of God?

While the evidence so far suggests the disinterest theory, it does not allow us to conclude absolutely that the medieval composers of these texts had no sense of authorship (as ownership) at all. Seuse himself expresses an anxious concern with the coherence and integrity of the text included in Part I. At the end of the book, Seuse names the title again, equates "Eternal Wisdom" (with whom "the Servant" has been speaking throughout the book) with *die goetleichen lieb* (divine love), and describes the book's contents. At the end of this list of contents, Seuse writes:

Swer das püchlein, dis mit großem vleiss geschriben und pegert [ist], er well es ab schriben, der schol es alles gantz augenleichen an worten und an sinnen schreiben, als es hie stet, vnd nicht dartzu legen noch nemen noch die wort verwandlen, Vnd schol dann ainist oder zwierend hie haben durich nöttleichen richten, vnd schol nicht besonders daraus schreiben, denn die hundert betrachtung zu hindrist; die schreib daraus, ob du wellest. wer im icht anders tuet, der schol fürchten gotes rachung, wenn er beraubet got des wirdigen lobes vnd des menschen pessrung Vnd denn, der sich dartzu gearbait hat, seiner arbeit. vnd darumb, wer es nicht well lazzen, der mensch werd gestozzen von der ewigen weisheit (B, f. 120^v–121^r).

Whoever wishes to copy this little book, that is written and desired with great vigor, he should copy all of it exactly in words and in meaning as it stands here, and not add anything nor delete anything nor change the words, and should then go through here once or twice and thoroughly correct it, and should copy no excerpts out of it, except for the hundred meditations at the end; these copy out of it, if you wish. Whoever does anything other than this, he should fear God's wrath, for he robs God of his worthy praise, and the human being of his improvement, and the one who toiled on it, of his labor. And for this reason, he who will not leave it, will be rejected [literally, pushed] by eternal wisdom.¹⁰¹

Seuse's earnest admonitions of those who might copy excerpts out of his book or change its wording stem most likely from a desire to avoid the trouble with the authorities that both his predecessor and teacher Meister Eckhart and he himself had experienced.¹⁰² Papal authorities found enough doctrinal errors in Eckhart's sermons and writings to initiate a trial for heresy by the Inquisition. Although the statements the commission ultimately questioned came both from his Latin writings and his vernacular sermons, the main concern of the authorities was Eckhart's preaching to the "simple souls"—that is, the laity—who could easily misunderstand him and fall into error. In his own defense, Eckhart claimed that many of the propositions cited as questionable had been falsely reported—these were primarily from the vernacular sermons.¹⁰³ Eckhart became vulnerable to charges of heresy, at least in his mind, then, because of the inaccurate copying (and understanding) of his German words.¹⁰⁴ Eckhart's defense rested largely on his insistence that his intentions were never to preach false doctrine so that even for those errors that he acknowledged, he should not be charged with heresy since his intentions had

been good.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the authorities took Eckhart, not the copyists, to task for these errors.

Such anxieties about transmission were not particularly singular. Indeed, Hildegard of Bingen denounced those who thought to abridge or alter her work, but she was anthologized anyway; Marie de France worried that someone else would take credit for her *lais*; and Chaucer was concerned about scribes breaking up his texts, which proved to be a legitimate concern when we consider the fragmentary transmission of his *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹⁰⁶ Bruno Quast remarks on a number of medieval German authors who take time within their poems to express anxiety or warn future readers and scribes about accurate copying.¹⁰⁷ Quast contrasts these indications of medieval concern over the stability of texts with recent debates in German medieval studies about the characteristic *instability* of medieval texts and authorship, particularly in the case of fiction.¹⁰⁸ Quast concludes that the greater importance of textual stability to the producers of these texts corresponds to a greater claim on truth or *auctoritas*.¹⁰⁹ The poems Quast considers are all based in the religious tradition and thus make truth claims insofar as the contents are supposed to transmit divine or holy material. Though the *inventio* of secular authorship with regard to translations of classical sources is increasingly prized in the medieval period, religious authorship remains a vexed enterprise that carries with it the potential for danger.¹¹⁰

Authorship in Eckhart's case, as well as in the examples related by Quast, centers on responsibility and liability. Eckhart proved liable even for the texts he claimed he did not write.¹¹¹ Seuse experienced a taste of Eckhart's trouble when his *Büchlein der Wahrheit* (*Little Book of Truth*), an explicit defense and elaboration of Eckhart's teachings, was attacked publicly at a provincial chapter in Maastricht in 1330.¹¹² This sense of authorship as potential liability finds a place in the Budapest manuscript. The "servant's" explicit direction to readers to copy his words completely and exactly, to correct the copy carefully against the source, not to change the text in any way, and to excerpt only the one section of meditations meant for excerpting shows a striking awareness of these material consequences of authorship. That is, Seuse understands that being a religious author means being responsible for the orthodoxy of a text and, in the religious milieu, such responsibility places him at risk.

Michel Foucault has commented on this risk in his now canonical essay, "What Is an Author?" In distinguishing modern authorship (from the late eighteenth century on) from earlier modes, Foucault claims that before the advent of copyright, "[s]peeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, *only* when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive" [emphasis added].¹¹³ However, it seems arguable that in the transmission of Seuse's text, it is precisely this sense of authorship as liability that *inhibits* the assigning of "real authors." Seuse instructs his readers to copy

his text exactly as it is for fear of being charged with corrupting “simple souls.” But his warnings are heeded only half the time. Of the 181 manuscripts including the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, almost half (81) transmit only excerpts or incomplete transcriptions. Moreover, except for three instances, it is transcribed without his name.¹¹⁴ If the disappearance through corruption of an attributed and complete text means that the author was simply forgotten (as Vollmann-Profe suggests for Mechthild), what does the Seuse evidence suggest? On the one hand, the infrequent appearance of his name could mean that he was forgotten, too, but that his *Little Book* was not. On the other, it could mean that he was remembered but not named because everyone knew his work—that is, because of his great fame and name-recognition as a preacher. Finally, it could mean that the scribes purposely left out authors’ names because named authorship was simply dangerous.

If an author cannot be named (either for fear of recriminations, or in the interests of honoring God), his or her authorship can be acknowledged (or legitimated) in other ways. We saw in the Würzburg manuscript that Mechthild’s writings were both shaped and legitimated by their association with sacred Latin texts. In the Budapest manuscript, we see a different kind of formal acknowledgment of authorship. Pellengriesser clearly heeds Seuse’s warnings and copies the *Büchlein* in its complete form, including the warning. In addition, Pellengriesser marks the beginning of Seuse’s *Büchlein* by writing the first six lines in a larger script, in bolder ink, and with an elaborate initial. He also gives red chapter titles and uses ornamented initials (sometimes in black, red, and green) for chapter beginnings.¹¹⁵ Two contemporary hands supply a two-page index of Seuse’s book that indicates chapter titles with corresponding page numbers and its title: *Hy hebet sich an das register des puches der ewigen weizhait* (B, f. 121v; Here begins the index of the book of eternal wisdom). The Eucharist treatise comes with a title in the top margin: *Unser [illegible] vnd Aller heiligen messe* (B, f. 135r; Our [?] and the Mass of All Saints). Its scribe (“Johannes D”) copies the chapter titles in red, draws two-line-large red initials and red lines under or through proper names. The scribe who finished the index to Seuse’s book added an index to the Eucharist treatise (B, f. 224v-225v). This index is signaled without its title: *Hie hebt sich an das register uber das vorgeschribene puch von den mayster und von dem junger* (B, f. 224v; Here begins the index about the preceding book about the master and the youth). If there seems to be little interest in marking or acknowledging an author by name in the Budapest manuscript, these other markers make clear that the first two booklets of the codex are considered to be important authored compositions.¹¹⁶

The same cannot be said for the Mechthild section, however. Barring an occasional ornamental letter (in brown ink, not red) at the top of a page, the Mechthild section bears none of these markers. Pellengriesser marks neither the beginning few lines of the Mechthild selection with larger script nor the

beginnings of new chapters with red initials, nor does he include chapter titles. The Mechthild section represents only a fraction of the chapters in *The Flowing Light*. Although Pellengriesser calls the section *das puech. . . jn dem man got minichleich erchent* (B, 245r; the book ... in which one lovingly sees God), Mechthild's writings do not count as a "book" in the same way as do the other two (Figure 3). At first glance this variation in presentation might suggest a different approach to male-authored texts than to female-authored texts: the titles, initials, ornamentation and indices could reflect the greater authority granted by these scribes to the booklets in question because they were written by men. However, as we have seen, all of the authors remain unnamed, and it is impossible to know whether Pellengriesser and Johannes D knew the gender of the authors whose texts they copy. As noted above, Pellengriesser copied the Mechthild section as is—he did not make the selection of material or the decision to leave out the chapter titles. The scribes who indexed the other texts could only base their work on what was in the booklets before them and thus had no indications of *The Flowing Light's* complete form with chapter divisions and titles; since they had no points of reference, they had no reason to make an index for the Mechthild section. It would therefore be wrong to attribute the difference in physical appearance of the Mechthild selection in the Budapest manuscript to an attitude toward female authorship.

Because gender does not seem to matter in the different treatment of Mechthild's text in B, one wonders whether the liberty taken in excerpting Mechthild's writings has something to do with the absence in her book of a warning like the one transmitted with Seuse's. But while Pellengriesser clearly heeds Seuse's warnings and copies the text complete, many other scribes did not. Not only do almost half the surviving manuscripts transmit the *Little Book* in excerpted or incomplete form, but also one of these uses the title of the book for a manuscript that contains nothing of Seuse's writing at all.¹¹⁷ Even with a warning against such tampering, Seuse's work, just like Mechthild's, suffers "corruption" and becomes anonymous fodder for mystical anthologies.

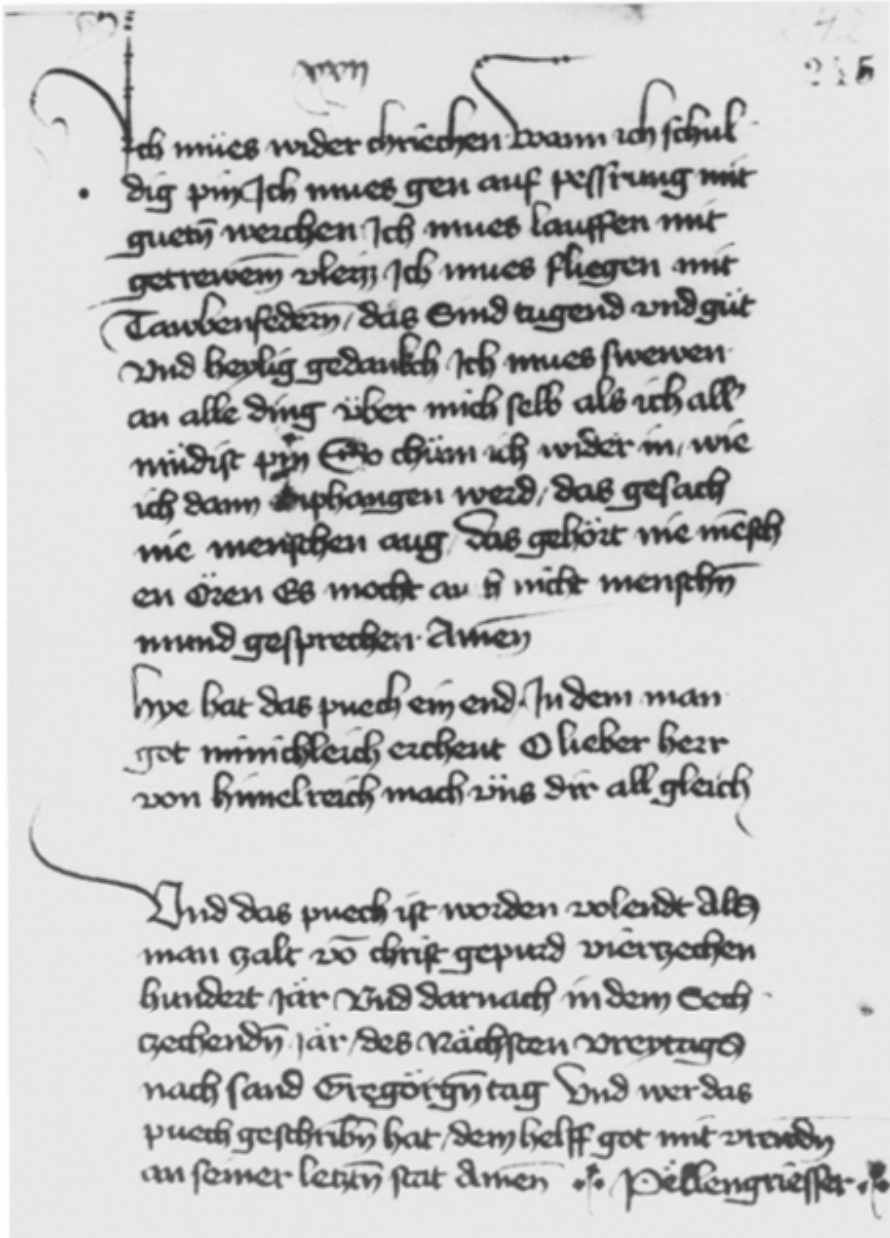


Figure 3. Folio 245r of Cod. Germ. 38, Manuscript Collection, National Széchényi Library, Budapest.

The Budapest manuscript shows us compositions without authors, authorship without names, and the corruption of compositions regardless of gender. Adding to this puzzle, is the fact that there are names in the Budapest manuscript, one of which appears to take on something suspiciously resembling what Foucault termed an “author-function.”¹¹⁸ They are not the names of our “new” authors, the compilers. None sign their names; no ownership or liability is attributed to them. Rather, two scribes (not

compilers) identify themselves in the Budapest codex: Fridericus Pellengriesser, the copyist of Parts I and III; and Johannes D, the copyist of Part II. Pellengriesser's name appears in a number of other manuscripts that demonstrate how his name begins to acquire an "author-function." András Vizkelety lists three manuscripts, all from the eastern High German region (like the Budapest manuscript) and all from the early fifteenth century.¹¹⁹ The handwriting of one of these three other Pellengriesser manuscripts does not match that of the texts he copied for B. The fact that his name appears in a handwriting we can assume is not his own suggests that at least one other contemporary copyist took his signature to be a claim of authorship. Already in 1419, the date of this manuscript (St. Florian Codex 39), then, Pellengriesser's name is beginning to perform the author-function for the texts he copies. The St. Florian manuscript makes note not only of Pellengriesser's name but also of his position as a public official: the last part of the manuscript is said to be *per fridricum hympekchen de Pallngries publicum Imperiali auctoritate notarium* (by F. H. Pellengriesser, public secretary by imperial authority).¹²⁰ Pellengriesser's authority as an imperial notary make him worthy of mention by the St. Florian scribe. His name functions as an author's name would—it grants authority and legitimacy to the copied text and takes responsibility for it. Similarly, by the dawn of the copyright age, when old books become commodities as well, the entire book we have been calling the Budapest manuscript is identified with Pellengriesser's name and the title of Seuse's text in Part I. On the spine of the binding there is a small label that, based on the handwriting and the shelf marks it bears, Vizkelety has traced back to an antiquarian bookseller of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. In addition to the shelf marks, the label bears the short title, *Pellengriesser von der Weisheit*.¹²¹ By this time, then, Pellengriesser is the "author" of the book "von der Weisheit," which becomes the title of the entire Budapest manuscript.

A broad analysis of the author-function of scribal identifications in the transmission of medieval devotional handbooks would place the case of the Budapest manuscript in a larger context, but such a study lies beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, the development of an author-function in association with Pellengriesser's name, taken in combination with the more obvious book markers given Seuse's work, dominates the transmission of the Budapest manuscript. The ornamented title of the *Little Book*, the repetition of the title in its epilogue along with a brief list of contents, the warning to future copyists, the repetition of the title in the index, the index itself, and the two signatures by Pellengriesser—all these factors contribute to later identifications and classifications of the whole codex as Pellengriesser's book *On Wisdom*. The Mechthild section, by contrast, is identified without a memorable title and quite simply as a book in which one sees God.¹²² This comment recalls Heinrich of Nördlingen's similar comment that "God is in this book," or Seuse's epilogue where he states that those who copy the text

incorrectly will suffer the wrath of the main speaker in the book, “Eternal Wisdom,” who is identified as divine love but also understood as Christ himself. In Pellengriesser’s remark at the end of the Mechthild section, this authorizing strategy returns; the authority of this book comes from its transmission of God as Word, from the presence of His voice and authorship. The similarity in form of the Mechthild section (mostly dialogic) and themes (divine love) fits just as nicely under the Seuse title. A sense of Mechthild’s authorship (her responsibility and liability for her book) is thus lost, first, because the new genre and tradition her writings have helped to produce (dialogic mystical anthologies) privileges the authorship of God, and, second, because in the course of the text’s transmission it becomes an epilogue, in this instance, to “Pellengriesser’s *Von der Weisheit*”—that is, because of the “author-function” of a scribal name and a title.

THE COLMAR MANUSCRIPT: COUNSELING DIALOGUES

The Colmar manuscript, a fifteenth-century German codex containing a significant number of excerpts from all seven parts of Mechthild’s book, complicates still further the questions of authorship, legitimacy, and audience raised by the other manuscripts: Who counts as an author? What constitutes authorship (original composition, compilation, copying)? What sorts of “authors” (composers, scribes, compilers) are named? How do scribes construct authority and legitimacy for their compilations? What is the relationship between the construction of said authority, the status of the vernacular, and the religious or gender status of an audience? Like the Würzburg and Budapest manuscripts, the Colmar codex collects the excerpts from Mechthild’s book in a rearranged order and flanks them on either side with sermons and a variety of other didactic tracts. (For a complete list of the contents, see Appendix D.) Unlike in W and B, however, Mechthild is named as the author of the section in C where her writings appear. In addition, the Colmar manuscript differs from W and B in that it is written entirely by one scribe with an index supplied by a contemporary hand. In this instance, we have a compilation of Mechthild’s writings and a compilation of a manuscript made by the same person.

When read together, the texts in this collection present us with a powerful example of compilation as authorship in which the dialogic relationship with text figures strongly. Indeed, the Colmar manuscript seems to have been put together with a very specific agenda in mind. The texts assembled are aimed at teaching the art of internal dialogue as it occurs in the meditation and contemplation of sacred objects or concepts such as the Eucharist and suffering. Moreover, they bear witness to a revival of Cistercian monastic practices for an audience of fifteenth-century Dominicans who are also being taught the kinds of pitfalls they may encounter should they fail to heed these

teachings.

At first glance, as is the case with many such compilations, the contents seem arbitrarily assembled, perhaps precisely because they are for the most part unattributed. However, a detailed table of contents composed by a contemporary hand, and the consecutive numbering of the pages by the main hand suggest that both scribes considered this collection a complete book. More importantly, when read through from beginning to end, the selections resonate meaningfully with each other and reveal connections and leitmotifs that unite them. Indeed, although Latin continued to be the dominant language of instruction used by the clergy, the German Colmar manuscript seems aimed at the inner religious practice of Dominican friars who, as the Würzburg manuscript also suggested, were engaging in various kinds of dialogue with various individuals and groups.

The first half of the manuscript includes very specific instructions on the inner life of a good religious person. The codex begins with a prose tract on the commandments of the New Testament and is followed by one on the six names of the Eucharist. The latter text has been attributed to a Cistercian known as the “Monk of Heilsbronn” and dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, though the verse prologue in which the monk identifies himself and which normally accompanies the tract in other manuscripts is not transmitted in the Colmar manuscript.¹²³ The third text is a sermon on a verse from John’s Epistles (1 John 3: 18: My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth), and the fourth, a tract on righteous lament (*von rehtem Jomer*). Then come Mechthild’s writings—literally, the centerpiece of the codex. Once Mechthild’s chapters come into “dialogue” with these earlier texts, their meaning and purpose shift to underscore and expand on the agenda set out in the first part of the compilation. The texts that follow the Mechthild excerpts—another anonymous tract on the usefulness of suffering, a sermon by Dominican preacher Johannes Tauler, and finally two saints’ lives: those of St. Christopher and St. Alexis—show how the scribe’s agenda fits into a more general effort among the mendicant orders in the fifteenth century to reassert Bernardian monastic values and to reaffirm the rejection of the world in the face of an increasing worldly presence in religious affairs.

In the first text of the manuscript, an anonymous tract contrasting the commandments of the New Testament with those of the old, readers are reminded of the virtues they must strive to perform: do penance, show compassion, exercise forgiveness, do unto others, love their enemy, do not fear worldly harm, take communion (described as *einunge mit im*, union with Him), and so on. The subsequent texts turn to contemplative practices, teaching through enumerated glosses precisely what readers should think when they are contemplating religious objects and principles. For example, the Monk’s treatise on the Eucharist begins: “Wir lesen in dem buochen dz der fronlichame gottes den er vns zuo einer spise hat gemacht sinen kinden

sehs namen hat durch die manigvaltigen vnd vnzallichen gnode die an der selben spise lit” (C, f. 7v; We read in the book that the Holy body of God, which he has made into food for us, his children, has six names because of the manifold and uncountable grace that lies in this same food). The treatise goes on for over sixty folios and describes not only what each Latin name for the Eucharist means in German but also what each name should call to mind. That is, the book instructs the reader quite literally in the *practice* of contemplation. This is underscored by the end of the text: the last sixteen leaves discuss four words — the high, the low, the long and the wide: “die hoehin vnd die tieffin, die lenge und die breiten (. . .) vs disen vier Worten schoepfent geistliche lüte viererleyge *Contemplieren* in dem sú sich vebent mit got” (C, f. 49v; out of these four words spiritual people create four kinds of contemplation in which they practice spiritual exercises with God). Consistent with the preceding instruction on the Eucharist, the focus here is also on words, each of which is glossed in terms of a specific kind of monastic spirituality— that advocated by the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux who is named on almost every page. This text thus favors a Cistercian form of spirituality heavily influenced by Bernard’s sermons on love, in which the *einunge* (union) with God is the ultimate goal of monastic existence, a goal achieved through ascending stages of contemplation.¹²⁴

Because *einunge* is the goal of the spirituality recommended here, because this union is represented in the Eucharist, and because the body of Christ consumed is a suffering body, suffering also becomes an important theme running through the manuscript. For example, the text titled *von rehtem jomer* (of righteous lament) explains how the righteous lament of suffering is better than joy, which can mix with falsehood. Further, the Tauler sermon enumerates the many ways in which suffering can be useful.

After the tract on lament, the chapters from Mechthild’s text are announced: “Alle dise noch geschribenen kapittel sint geschriben vs den vii buecheren sant mehthilden und heisset das vs lúhtende lieht der gotheit” (C, f. 78r; All of these following written chapters are written from the seven books of Saint Mechthild and are called the radiating light of the Godhead). It is unclear why Mechthild is called a saint here, since she is merely a *helig maget* (holy maiden) in the source text. Perhaps she is already being conflated with Mechthild of Hackeborn, who, though never officially canonized, was widely revered as a saint even before her death. Regardless of whether this conflation was already a factor in this manuscript, however, it is significant that Mechthild is named as a saint, a point to which I will return.

The heading of the first chapter of the Mechthild selection declares that *Mit aht tugenden soltu gon zuo gottes tische* (C.f. 77v; With eight virtues shall you go to God’s banquet . . .), thus taking up the theme of the Eucharist and the contemplative practices associated with it considered so carefully in the Monk of Heilsbronn’s text earlier in the codex. This first chapter of the Mechthild selection begins (corresponds to III, 15: 4–6): “Die vil torehtigen

beginen, wie sint ir also frefel, dz ir vor vnserem almehtigem richtere nû bibenent, wenne ir gottes lichamen so dicke mit einer blinden gewonheit nement” (C, f. 78r; The very foolhardy beguines, how can you be so shameless that you do not tremble before our almighty judge when you so often take God’s body out of blind habit!). The beguines addressed in this chapter clearly fail to contemplate the various names of the sacrament as they take communion. Rather, they simply go through the motions. The speaker in the chapter expresses shame over her own inferior piety, and reports that for this reason she refrained from taking communion on an important feast day.¹²⁵ Her own “righteous lament” is followed by a vision not of the suffering body of Christ, but rather of the suffering bodies of poor and unthinking souls. In response to her humble feelings of inferiority, the soul receives a visionary communion that quite literally empowers her to make demands of the divine. In particular, she demands that Christ be the ransom for “the imprisoned,” by which she means those in purgatory. She acquires such a great power that she takes Christ with her “in all his strength” to a terrible place: a swamp of hellfire and wretchedness, smoke and stench. Lying, literally cooking and screaming in this muck are the fallen souls of people whose spirits had been blinded by the flesh. To accent her point here, she adds a rhyming couplet: “Dz fleisch hatte verblendet iren geist, dar vmb suttē sū aller meist” (C, f. 78v-79r; The flesh had blinded their spirit [ghost], that is why they boiled the most).¹²⁶ Once the soul inquires after the number of imprisoned souls (they are innumerable) and especially after the *klosenere* (cloistered ones; they are out of sight at the bottom of the swamp because they sinned in secret), Mechthild demands that Christ free as many of the suffering prisoners as He can. He complies, bringing 70,000 of the poor souls to a better place, reducing their suffering in the purgatorial swamp by ten years.

This vision is striking for many reasons, not least because of the authority with which the soul first scolds her fellow beguines and then gives orders to Christ, intervening in his cosmic judgments. However, in the context of this manuscript, the vision must be read differently, specifically in terms of the didactic agenda set up in the earlier texts: if the *klosenere* do not contemplate the Eucharist properly, if they continue to sin in secret (for example, thoughtlessly going through the motions of religious practice), they will end up at the bottom of the burning swamp of purgatory, bound to devils. If they do not contemplate the righteous suffering of Christ in the eucharistic ceremony, if they do not themselves suffer righteously—that is, follow the commandments of the New Testament, turn the other cheek to unjust persecution, and renounce worldly comforts—they will suffer far worse in purgatory. If the chapter’s direct address to women seems an odd jump at first, the lesson for the friars becomes clear in this impressive scene of cosmic hellfire.

Indeed, this message is clearly one of the most important of those the scribe wishes to convey with the Mechthild excerpts. Of the eighty-two

chapters included, twenty-two deal with the fate of souls in purgatory, at the hands of devils, or in hell. Thirty of the chapters relate to *Gottesminne* (divine love) and describe the *einunge*, which as I have mentioned is the ultimate goal of contemplative practice as presented in the manuscript. Ten relate to the Dominican order or to the days before the Last Judgment, six to pain and suffering, and fourteen to none of these categories, having to do either with saints, angels, or miscellaneous religious instruction. The two subjects that interest the scribe the most, however, are, first, the goal of monastic existence—*einunge mit got*—achieved via the numerous contemplative practices and righteous suffering recommended in the codex and, second, the consequences of not following these practices—that is, terrible suffering in purgatory.

Mechthild scholars agree that the selections from Mechthild's book in this manuscript indicate a preference for the Dominican order.¹²⁷ However, it is not clear from the Mechthild selections in isolation whether the book is meant for Dominican friars involved in the spiritual care of religious women like the beguines or for the women themselves. The sixteenth chapter in the Mechthild selection (V, 5 in E), seems also to be directed at beguines, describing one in purgatory whose particular flaw while alive lay in ignoring human counsel about her forms of worship.¹²⁸ The chapter thus begins by lamenting the fact that holy works performed without having been counseled are as damaging to the individual as sin. This is the person, the narrator explains, who says she has surpassed human counsel and wants to live according to God's counsel alone.¹²⁹ The text continues: "Von disen Worten gruwelot mir ie und ie, wand sich kein mensche an keiner stat also rehte nuczlich demuetigen mag, also dz er mit undertenigem herzen cristanliches rotes volget. Dz han ich funden an einer frowwen; die hette vnsern herren von herzen lieb und der lieb in gebruchte s^v mit also unmenslicher erbeit, dz ir nature verdorrete also sere, dz s^v muoste sterben" (C, f. 94^v; These words horrify me forever and always, for no person in any state of being can truly and usefully humble himself except by following Christian counsel with a submissive heart. I discovered this in a woman; she loved our Lord with all her heart and she practiced this love with such inhuman exertion that her nature withered away so severely that she had to die). Clearly a caveat against overzealous spiritual exercises like fasting and self-mortification, this chapter balances the many instructions on contemplation with a warning against taking them to physical extremes. Asking Christ for an explanation of this person's fate, Mechthild receives an answer that supports the authority of human counsel: "Alle tugende sint mir vnmere, die one rot geschehent, wand ich kam in ertrich mit grosser undertenikeit minem vatter und allen menschen vnd so fuor ich ze himele in ganczer friheit; mer dz ich nie getet, do volgete mir nieman mitte" (C, f. 94^v; All virtues are hateful to me which occur without counsel for I came to earth in great submissiveness to my father and to all humans and then I went to heaven in complete freedom; but that which I never did [that is, acting without counsel], no one followed me in that).

Whereas Mechthild's use of a female example here probably alludes both to an audience of beguine women (i.e., her sisters in her own community) and to the counsel of their Dominican confessors, considering the chapter in its context in C causes its emphasis to shift. Indeed, the indicators that Mechthild wrote also for a general audience — her choice to write in the vernacular, her embrace of the Dominican mission addressed in Chapter 1—are strengthened because of this context. The friars addressed here can read this in two ways: first, that they themselves should refrain from letting their contemplation turn obsessive and dangerous and second, that they should foster the *undertenigkeit* or submissiveness of the women in their charge, thereby shoring up the friars' particular authority as counselors.

The emphasis on the authority of the human counselor here cannot prove conclusively that the scribe intended the codex solely for use by friars. However, the concluding texts of the manuscript—the lives of Saints Christopher and Alexis—provide us with some further clues. These texts tell of men who gradually come to serve God in imitation of the Apostles and Christ, that is, men who adopt the commandments of the New Testament and denounce the world as was recommended in the manuscript's opening tract. Alexis is the better example, for he is able to pray and fast, practices of which the giant Christopher is incapable. This explains perhaps why the compiler places the life of Alexis last when in the legendaries it generally precedes Christopher's.¹³⁰ Indeed, Alexis's story frames the manuscript perfectly. While the initial text privileges the virtues of the New Testament over those of the old, the last text, Alexis's *vita*, depicts a man who lives this distinction, completely rejecting the Old Testament commandments in following those of the new: He lives in complete poverty, turns the other cheek to the servants who insult him, and refuses to "honor" his parents by alleviating their suffering over his supposed absence during the seventeen years he lives unknown among them.

In the fifteenth century, the authoritative source for saints' lives was a text composed by a Dominican: Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. Second in popularity only to the Bible in the late Middle Ages, it enjoyed numerous German translations.¹³¹ In her reexamination of the work's transmission history, Sherry Reames attributes its apparent dominance to the efforts of papal authorities as well as of the mendicant orders to reassert the monastic ideals of purity and detachment from the world in daily monastic practice.¹³² Indeed, she argues that Jacobus's versions of the legends are part of this reassertion, noting that the lives are pared down to follow a simple pattern and that the saints are revered no longer simply for being especially devout, but rather for their miracles and for their complete rejection of the world. These efforts occurred, Reames argues, in response to the increased intensity of lay devotion and claims to sanctity that began to emerge in the thirteenth century and that intensified in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹³³ This was clearly an issue of control. The Dominican order, when founded in the

thirteenth century, effected a break with the cloistered monastic practices of the Cistercians and Benedictines in favor of mendicancy and missionary work in towns. By the late fourteenth century and on through the fifteenth, however, reform movements arose from within most orders to renew their observance of the basic principles and rules by which they were supposed to live and work (for example, the rule of absolute poverty, or living chastely).¹³⁴ One scholar explains the quick success of this movement— known in German scholarship as the *Observanzbewegung* (observance movement)—as the result of the “decline of discipline among the *conventuals* [the name for the nonobservants] and of the pious, exemplary lifestyle of the observants, who, through their edifying example, the eagerness in their preaching and pastoral care, and devout execution of mass, had a beneficial effect on the laity.”¹³⁵ The return to an emphasis on stricter forms of monastic piety for the Dominican clergy, then, whose mission took them regularly outside monastery walls, was an effort to reclaim control of sanctity from the laity and secular clergy, and from courtly authorities for whom sainthood was often a matter of local politics.

Given this trend in Dominican thought, choosing the lives of Christopher and especially Alexis to conclude the Colmar manuscript gains in significance and places this early fifteenth-century book squarely in the midst of the struggle to control religious enthusiasm among the laity by educating those who supervised their spiritual care. Just as we saw with the Würzburg codex, the compiler of the Colmar manuscript provides a controlling context for his selections of *The Flowing Light*. To encourage the Dominicans’ renewed and reasserted control of sanctity, the scribe instructs his audience in proper spiritual practice as recommended by the example and writings of various saints. Enjoying a central place among these saints in the codex is “Saint Mechthild” and her book, *das uz lühtende lieht der gotheit* (the radiating light of the Godhead). Despite having excerpted *The Flowing Light* as well as upset the order of the chapters, the compiler of the Colmar manuscript exhibits a much greater respect for his source as an authored composition than did the compilers of the Mechthild selections in W and B. Indeed, the compiler of C felt it important to note the book and chapter numbers of the source in the margins of his reordered version. These notations make the association of book with author explicit in this codex where it is strategically explained or absent in the others. Where the scriptural framing in W lends legitimacy to the vernacular writings, in C Mechthild’s presumed sanctity makes the writings legitimate and replaces the indifference toward her name evident in the other manuscripts. Mechthild’s writings as the centerpiece of the manuscript are then balanced on either side by more traditional (orthodox, authoritative, male) figures. While St. Bernard is the dominant authority in the tracts preceding Mechthild’s, the two traditional and extremely popular male saints’ lives (Alexis and Christopher) are used to conclude the manuscript. Based on the context provided by the codex taken as a whole, then, the writings of

Mechthild become part of a larger didactic conversation with an audience of Dominican friars whose mission outside the monastery walls has made them more susceptible to the sins of the world. The scribe legitimates this enterprise, the instruction of potentially erring friars, by reference to a series of contemplative saints. In contrast to the Würzburg manuscript, we have here a vernacular codex aimed at an audience of friars who need help less with their sermons than with their inner lives in the face of their conversations in the world (with beguines and the laity). Rather than leave Mechthild's authorship invisible, however, the compiler of this book presents it as a product of sanctity within a textual context that wants to honor the monastic virtues and the teachings of saints in general.

Conclusion

The transmitters of Mechthild's writings—the Dominicans of Halle, Heinrich of Nördlingen, Margaret of the Golden Ring, the compilers and makers of W, B, and C — all believed in the legitimacy of Mechthild's instruction and the holy authority of her source. Given the canonical laws against women teaching in public, however, they use varying methods in differing contexts to assert this legitimacy. The Latin translators thus invoke a tradition of biblical female prophets to justify their "universalizing" of a female-authored text for a learned male audience. The compiler of the Colmar codex, writing for an audience of friars and the women they advise, legitimizes Mechthild's writings by asserting her sainthood and surrounding her words with those of other holy or saintly men (Bernard, Tauler, Christopher, and Alexis). By contrast, the owners of the complete German translation (Heinrich of Nördlingen and Margaret of the Golden Ring) send the book to other women religious, ostensibly obeying the restrictions on women's public instruction by limiting Mechthild's teachings to a confined female space. This part of the complex transmission of Mechthild of Magdeburg's writings thus reveals an anxiety over female authorship in the efforts of writers and makers of all kinds (Mechthild *and* her translators) who *want* to see *The Flowing Light* accomplish its universal mission. When Mechthild's authorship is qualified in those manuscripts aimed at male audiences, or when it is confined to the "private" sphere of women teaching women in the manuscript transmitting her writings whole, we see the ways in which her message managed to get through. We also see that an open acknowledgment of Mechthild's named authorship is made subordinate in the transmission.

Mechthild's fall into obscurity thus began with inclusion despite being a woman, not exclusion because she was a woman. But the presence of her writings in compilations tells another story: that of the inclusion of her writings in a new tradition of vernacular devotional prose modeled on the ideal internal dialogue with God. This tradition conventionally elevates the

authorship of God over that of humans. Nevertheless, in encouraging not only the internal mystical dialogue in its readers and listeners but also a productive dialogic interaction with text (the words of God on the page), it produces new and varied forms of earthly authorship. The manuscripts examined here document multiple moments of authoring, making, and transmission in a single manuscript (W, B), as well as providing a compilation that was not only conceived as a book but became one (C). They demonstrate that authority and legitimacy come less from authors' names than from association with other already authorized words of God (W, B) or of saints (C). They reveal a textual culture where book titles, indices, rubricated text, and scribal signatures perform an author-function in a context where the assertion of named authorship could be politically and personally dangerous (B). And they show us how Mechthild's vernacular writings were used to instruct on the subject of the divine for different groups of religious (both lay and clerical)—for the composers of sermons and their listeners (W), for the devout reader (B), and for friars engaged in pastoral care of beguines (C). This “productive” transmission of *The Flowing Light*, like the earlier translations, also attests to the limited success of Mechthild's mission to instruct all religious people. Yet, once again, in the mission's fulfillment, her role as named earthly composer is either absent or muted.

The transmission of *The Flowing Light* thus teaches us that it was not only the passing of those who knew Mechthild in person or by reputation that led to the anonymous use of her writings in compilations and hence to her obscurity. Nor was her name excluded from a roster of mystical writers based on her gender alone. Rather, her book helped to produce and then became part of a culture that privileged dialogue with God over earthly authority. Perhaps ironically, then, it is the very success of Mechthild's book as a representative of this vibrant dialogic and increasingly literary vernacular culture that leads to the growing obscurity of her named authority.

Productive Consumption: Women Readers and the Production of Late Medieval Devotional Anthologies

Wann dy diern gotz soll stetiglich lesen, denn dy
lesung ist über alle maßen nütze . . .

For the maids of God should read constantly,
because reading is immeasurably useful . . .

— Humbert of Romans¹

The eleven manuscripts examined in this chapter (K, S, Ha, M₁, M₂, Ka, Mü, Mü₂, Mü₃, Mü₄, and H) anthologize between one and four of Mechthild's chapters, usually in abbreviated form.² None of these manuscripts names Mechthild as an author or authority. Many of them lack attributions of authorship completely, although authorities such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine, and Gregory are cited frequently. This part of the transmission thus directs our attention even further away from *The Flowing Light* as a coherent set of writings with a single author. Instead, we must consider the relationship between the production of these devotional anthologies and their readers. Mechthild wrote down her revelations, so she writes, because both God and her confessor commanded and encouraged her to do so. Clerics also gave the orders to translate *The Flowing Light* into Latin and Middle High German. However, in the context of these eleven manuscripts, the impetus for producing the books came not from the clerics or God, but largely from prospective readers. Reform movements affecting the monastic and mendicant orders in the fifteenth century, referred to collectively in historiography as the "observance movement," produced an increased need, especially in women's communities, for spiritual guidance and care from priests and preachers. Because there were not enough clergymen to meet this need, however, members of religious communities who could not read Latin turned to books containing devotional and instructional writing in the vernacular. If such books were not available, devout women commissioned their production or produced them themselves.

Reform-minded clergy involved in the *cura monialium* (spiritual care of religious women) both encouraged and mistrusted the transmission of religious writing in vernacular anthologies. On the one hand, they wanted women religious to be more virtuous and obedient in their worship and daily

practices; for this reason they would certainly perceive the reading of sermons and tracts on religious virtue and experience to be beneficial. On the other hand, they were not completely comfortable with certain excessive ascetic practices undertaken by women to induce mystical experience and devotion. For this reason, the reading of mystical experiences and revelations raised suspicion among some clerical authorities. At the center of this suspicion was an outspoken anxiety about the possibility of demonic influence. I will argue that this suspicion was also fueled by the realization that efforts to control the spiritual practices of the “simple people” might be compromised or undermined by the mystical experience of the divine. If in the thirteenth century a beguine’s *authorship* of mystical revelations and instruction was perceived as potentially threatening to some members of the clergy, then in the fifteenth century the *reproduction* and *transmission* of this literature among nuns and lay religious raised a similar set of concerns.

The manuscripts I consider here say less about the problem of female authorship than they do about the related problem of female readers as consumers and producers. Indeed, these books bear traces of the tensions between the need for and production of devotional reading material and the corresponding anxiety about controlling its reception. A brief account of the observance movement among the monastic and mendicant orders in fifteenth-century Germany, as well as the relationship of monastic reform generally to the larger context of late medieval manuscript production, proves essential for understanding the eleven manuscripts anthologizing excerpts from Mechthild’s writings as well as how they functioned as devotional handbooks. The first four manuscripts (K, S, Ha, and M₁), which I will examine in depth, represent four different compilations in which the tensions produced by observance pressures manifest themselves in a variety of ways. The other seven manuscripts (Mü, Mü₂, Mü₃, Mü₄, Ka, M₂, H), transmit different versions of one popular devotional compilation, each of which includes one chapter from Mechthild’s book. The compilation is known in the scholarship as the Ebrach *Spruchsammlung* (collection of sayings) because it is attributed in one of the early manuscript witnesses (Mü₃) to Engelhart von Ebrach. I will conclude with a brief examine of this set of manuscripts, reflecting on the patterns of transmission that emerged in the observance movement and the effect these patterns had on the legacy of Mechthild’s authorship. The anonymity of many of the texts in the compilation as well as the way it is transmitted seems symptomatic for the fate of medieval religious writings in general, and in particular those of Mechthild. Indeed, the compilation appears to suffer the same fate as Mechthild’s collection of revelations; it is appreciated for a time as a whole and becomes fodder a century later for new compilations that neither acknowledge the original compiler as author nor preserve the integrity of the compilation. Authorial renown in this context proves to be plainly irrelevant as the increased “consumption” of Mechthild’s text within the Ebrach compilation by more and more “religious people”

contributes to the gradual disappearance of *The Flowing Light* as an important devotional book by a holy woman.

Observance and the Production of Devotional Anthologies

Of the seventeen vernacular compilation manuscripts in the Mechthild transmission, five are from the fourteenth century, ten from the fifteenth, and two from the sixteenth. The eleven manuscripts examined in this chapter date largely to the latter part of the fifteenth century and include only a few excerpts from Mechthild's book.³ This pattern of transmission—increased production of more and more fragmentary or mosaic-like compilations in the fifteenth century—parallels a wider trend in the production and reproduction of religious writing in Europe in the late Middle Ages.⁴ The advent of paper production, an increase in vernacular literacy, and various calls for religious reform led to an explosion of vernacular religious writing in the fourteenth century and an explosion of its transmission in the fifteenth century.⁵ German writings composed in the first half of the fourteenth century—like those of Eckhart, Seuse, Tauler, various vernacular sermon collections (for example, the St. Georgener sermons, the High Alemannic sermons), vernacular legendaries, and the hagiographical literature found in the Dominican women's convent chronicles known as the "Sisterbooks"—enjoyed a noticeable increase in transmission in the fifteenth century. Seuse's *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* (written ca. 1330) is preserved in only twenty-nine manuscripts from the fourteenth century, but in 260 from the fifteenth.⁶ Of the thirty-seven extant manuscripts of the nine Sisterbooks, only one dates to the fourteenth century when the chronicles were written, as opposed to twenty produced in the fifteenth century.⁷

By the fifteenth century, compilation manuscripts had become increasingly common.⁸ As we saw with the manuscripts I analyzed in Chapter 3, the codices I refer to as devotional anthologies are composed of a range of religious texts (sermon excerpts, treatises on types of meditation, religious sayings, exempla, proverbs, saints' lives, and the like) but can be distinguished from other more coherent or pragmatic types of collections like legendaries (books transmitting only saints' lives), sermon collections, Books of Hours, and Psalters. Despite the occasional repetition of groups of texts in different codices, these compilations are highly individual, "each of them different and each of them differently interesting."⁹ Many of them display the handwriting of several scribes and codicological evidence frequently indicates that they were circulated as booklets before being bound.¹⁰ As a result, they often look like the product of haphazard collection. Indeed, Geneviève Hasenohr remarks on the "proliferating but anarchic literacy output in the vernacular, which was often for private use" in France and in Italy, particularly for women readers.¹¹ Similar patterns are evident for England,¹²

although, as A. I. Doyle has argued, finding evidence of these manuscripts, particularly those produced in monasteries, is generally much harder in England than on the continent because of the suppression and destruction of monasteries and their libraries during the English Reformation.¹³ Nevertheless, recent scholarship on both sides of the channel reflects a growing sense that even the most apparently arbitrary collection upon closer scrutiny reveals a degree of forethought and logic on the part of the compilers and binders. The collections are thus increasingly studied for what they might suggest both about literary and religious culture and about the audiences they imply.¹⁴

The increase in the production of vernacular religious compilation manuscripts in the fifteenth century is consistently related to the impulses to improve and reform religious practices that arise across Europe. These impulses took varying forms. In England, a theological movement for change came out of the university, instigated primarily by Wycliffe and his writings. The resulting “Lollard” movement became quite popular, enjoying followers not only in the university, but also elsewhere, particularly among the laity, but it was ultimately deemed heretical. The coincidence of its popularity with a major upheaval among the “lower orders of society” (the peasant revolt of 1381) probably accounts for the anxious and repressive reactions to it among both secular and ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁵ A large part of this movement consisted of a drive to translate important devotional texts (particularly the Bible) into the vernacular.¹⁶ In the Low Countries, the laity were also involved in a reform movement that promoted a religious life following basic monastic and contemplative ideals, though the *Devotio moderna*, as it is called, was never condemned as heretical. The practitioners of this movement were known as the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life. One of the main activities of the Brothers of the Common Life was the production of devotional manuscripts, including translations of religious texts like Books of Hours into the vernacular.¹⁷

On the rest of the continent, the impulse to improve religious life came primarily from within the religious orders whose leaders saw the need to return to a strict observance of monastic rule. This so-called observance movement began in Italy (among Franciscans and Augustinians) and developed simultaneously among Dominicans and Benedictines throughout Spain, France, and the German-speaking territories, as well as eastward into Poland, Bohemia, and Austria.¹⁸ People outside the orders were also involved in promoting monastic reform — secular clergy from the university, popes and kings, ecclesiastical and secular princes, noble lords, city councilmen, educated humanists, and pious men and women.¹⁹ The desire for reform was motivated by the spiritual bankruptcy and division left in the wake of war, plague, natural disaster, and the political strife relating to the papal schism in the second half of the fourteenth century.²⁰ The schism of 1378, for example, resulted in a split in the Dominican order between those who supported the

Roman Pope and those who supported the Pope in Avignon, a situation that diverted men on both sides from attending to spiritual matters and allowed for conditions in the convents and monasteries to decline. Ten years later, the Roman contingent began instituting reforms that the Avignonese resisted. In the early fifteenth century, Johannes Nider, a Dominican in the Avignonese camp who did favor reform, is quoted by a contemporary as having connected the success of the Hussite heresy to the unwillingness of monks and nuns to reform:²¹ “Uss münchen und nunnen komt kain guotes, die Hussen verderbent sy denn zuo grund” (If nothing good [that is, no good works or virtues] comes from monks and nuns, the Hussites will corrupt them to ruin).²² For many clergy, this state of affairs cried out for change.

While the movement stretched across Europe, the goals and the degrees to which those goals were pursued varied from order to order, and region to region. For the Teutonic Order of Knights, for example, the apparent aims for the upholding of vows, rules, and statutes were merely a cover for the real intent to clean up the financial status of the order, to strengthen its central authority, and to reestablish a working system of command and obedience. By contrast, the mendicant orders aimed to renew the original ideals and intentions of their founders, though different orders focused on different ideals; some stressed the renewal of poverty and begging, others, the intensification of study and preaching, and, still others, the return to a primitive hermetic existence.²³

Although efforts were made to renew both men’s and women’s religious communities, it was the reform of nuns that led most directly to the increased production and popularity of vernacular devotional literature, particularly in the German-speaking regions.²⁴ A common problem for monastic communities generally was the unwillingness to renounce worldly status and its associated comforts and privileges, such as servants, elegant clothing, rich food, worldly power, and influence. Efforts to break down this resistance in the Benedictine order came from the university.²⁵ Indeed, as Petrus Becker argues, “systematic [*wissenschaftliche*] university education created a level of parity on which bourgeois and nobles could interact, an important precondition for breaking down the privileges accorded the nobility in many monasteries.”²⁶ As Becker also suggests, because university training was not available to women, the problems associated with women’s assertions of and claims to noble status were more difficult to overcome (25). One thinks here of the fascinating story of Maria of Wolkenstein, a Franciscan nun (in the order of St. Clare) and the daughter of the well-known German poet, Oswald of Wolkenstein (1377–1445).²⁷ Between 1454 and 1459 Maria resisted the efforts of Bishop Nicholas of Cusa to reform her convent in Brixen.²⁸ During this conflict, Maria made several appeals to her powerful family in which she complained of the harsh new rules (strict claustration, renunciation of worldly associations, and poverty) as well as of Nicholas’s at times violent treatment of the resistant nuns — at one point he sent armed men into the convent to

occupy it and force obedience. Maria's brothers responded with threats to the bishop, who most likely excommunicated the whole family. Eventually, Maria left the convent and found a place in a community of St. Clare nuns with a more amenable rule and the bishop was then able to carry out the reform of the Brixen convent.

With the fifteenth century, then, came increased pressure from within monastic orders to clean up and re-spiritualize the monastic life of both men and women. As Maria of Wolkenstein's example makes clear, efforts to reform nuns simply by ordering them to change or by sending one or two reform-minded individuals into an entrenched group sometimes encountered staunch resistance. A more effective strategy, particularly in the Dominican order, proved to be the formation of entirely new communities consisting of women sharing reformist beliefs. The foundation of these communities furthered reform efforts, but it also added to the already existing problem of the *cura monialium*. While most women's communities were self-governed, they nevertheless required priests and/or preachers for the administering of the sacraments, the celebration of the mass, and spiritual guidance by way of sermon and confession. Yet, even before the establishment of newer reformed convents, in the province of Teutonia (southern German-speaking regions) women's convents outnumbered men's houses by three to one, an imbalance that persisted into the fifteenth century.²⁹ The reform-minded women in the new houses filled the void left by this imbalance with medieval devotional books. Because there were not enough friars to give sermons in person, the women resorted to reading written records of the sermons. As a result, while only about 10 percent of the houses in a given order accepted strict observance, 90 percent of extant German religious manuscripts can be traced to reformed houses.³⁰ The explosion of vernacular literary production in German is thus directly related to the German experience of observant reform, contributing to its distinctive profile in relation to reform in other regions.³¹

It is within this context that the Mechthild transmission in anthologies belongs. The desire for more reading material among fifteenth-century observant groups fueled an increased production not of new writings but of devotional compilations of material that was already circulating in some way. Of the eleven Mechthild manuscripts discussed in this chapter, eight (K, S, Ha, M₁, M₂, Ka, M_{ü2}, and M_{ü3}) date from the fifteenth century, six of these (K, S, Ha, Ka, M_{ü2}, and M_{ü3}) can be traced to monastic houses, one (K) is associated with women's religious communities, and two (Ha, M₂) were commissioned for and owned by women. Indeed, Christina Meckelnborg has surmised that the first half of the Koblenz manuscript (K) may have been produced for the very first Dominican reformed women's convent, the house at Schönensteinbach near Colmar in Alsace (founded in 1397).³² Furthermore, in addition to the Mechthild chapters that they transmit, all eleven manuscripts collect didactic devotional texts that address the everyday and contemplative life of religious men and women. All of these anthologies could have been

produced in the setting described above and for the reasons that setting implies: The books seem to be meant to compensate for the insufficient numbers of priests and preachers by disseminating their religious instructional material in vernacular collections. The Koblenz manuscript, for example, contains Eckhart sermons in both Latin and German, sayings attributed to the church fathers as well as to more recent luminaries such as Bernard of Clairvaux, tracts by various local Dominican notables (Albertus Magnus [ca. 1200–1280], Johannes of Sterngasse [d. after 1327], and Dietrich of Freiberg [ca. 1250–ca. 1318]); and, in the second part of the manuscript, the life of St. Catherine of Siena whose confessor was the very first Dominican observant reformer, Raymond of Capua.³³ The Stuttgart manuscript (S) contains fifty-five sermons from the so-called St. Georgener collection and an excerpt from a sermon on the Eucharist by Franciscan Konrad Bömlin (ca. 1380–1449) who was active in the *cura monialium* in the area around Eßlingen (near present-day Stuttgart).³⁴ Ha, from Augsburg, contains the *Büchlein von der Liebhabung Gottes* (*Little Book on Loving God*) by Thomas Peuntner (1390–1439); a sermon and a letter of spiritual advice by Johannes Nider (1380–1438), who was a widely known figure in the Dominican observance movement; a tract attributed to the Franciscan mystic and Mechthild contemporary David of Augsburg (ca. 1200–1272); and the life of Elsbeth Achler of Reute (1386–1420), a Franciscan tertiary under the guidance of Konrad Kügelin, an observant Augustinian friar.³⁵ And M₁ (also from Augsburg) includes a selection of twenty-four sermons by Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300–1361); excerpts from Eckhart’s sermons and tracts as well as pseudo-Eckhart writings; a text by Rulman Merswin (1307–1382), a layman who was part of the Friends of God circle that produced the Middle High German translation of Mechthild’s book; a section from Heinrich Seuse’s *Life*; and a mystical tract by Hendrik Herp (d. 1477), an observant Franciscan friar active in the Low Countries.³⁶ The other seven manuscripts all contain versions of the Ebrach *Spruchsammlung*, a compilation of Eckhartian and Bernardian short texts for mystical contemplation and religious instruction.

While reform-minded men among the clergy were interested in promoting strict observance and obedience among the women in their care, they were not always so sanguine about the growing importance and exchange of the kinds of books examined here. That books were thought to be less than ideal as substitutes for the presence of preachers becomes clear in the following statement by Erhard von Dürningen (active ca. 1434), a priest of the Strassburg Johannite monastery and guest preacher at the Dominican convent of St. Niklaus in undis. Erhard complains about the nuns’ desire for written material: “Jo so sprechent sv: ‘Scrip mir daz gebet an vnd die bredie!’ Vnd gont alles mit den vszwendigen dingen vnd bvechern vmb es kvmmet weder jn die vernvnft noch jn daz hertze nvt” (And so they say: ‘Write down the prayer for me and the sermon!’ And as much as they busy themselves with the external things and books, it enters into neither the mind nor the heart).³⁷

Erhard's comment gives the impression that at least part of his frustration lies with the unwieldy demands on his time made by the nuns' requests for sermon and prayer transcripts. Even more frustrating, however, is that this extra work apparently has little effect on the spirituality of the readers, for the readings fail to enter their heads and hearts.

Such concerns over the proper development of the spirit were certainly genuine, but they also harbor anxieties over clerical authority. As Werner Williams-Krapp has pointed out, Dominican promoters of observance wished to re-create the glorious achievements of the great Dominican religious men and women of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but not their excesses.³⁸ Eberhard Mardach (d. 1428), a Dominican from Nuremberg, was explicit about this tension in his *Sendbrief von wahrer Andacht* ("Letter of True Devotion," 1422), a didactic text addressed to a "geistliches kind" (spiritual child). Mardach advocates great vigilance and mistrust towards ecstatic, mystical experiences and identifies those susceptible to these experiences as individuals "die da eigens willen vnd eigens sinnes ze vil haben vnd auch diz, die der warheit vnd guter gesunder lere nit glauben noch volgen wöllen, sunderlich irn obern oder den eltern (who have too much of their own will and own mind and also those who will not believe or follow the truth and good, proper teachings, especially of their superiors or parents).³⁹ Further, he writes, among cloistered people it is the ones *die da irn orden nach irm vermügen nit redlich noch gantzlich halten* (who maintain their order neither appropriately nor completely according to their ability) who are in the most danger.⁴⁰ Experiences of God induced by excessive ascetic practices or devotion to the Eucharist or the crucifix were, in Mardach's opinion, decidedly *not* evidence of God's grace precisely because they were induced by an individual's actions. However, as this quote makes clear, Mardach objects to these actions not only because they are prompted by selfish desire (*eigen wille*), but also because they defy the priestly counsel of obedience and moderation; the willful ones are those who will not follow the good and proper teachings of their superiors. Mystical experience is thus for Mardach a sign that the individual is not only self-centered and willful, but also potentially indifferent to the rules of the order and, by extension, the authority of the preachers.⁴¹

Williams-Krapp reads Mardach's letter as a product of an official offensive against mystical practices among women initiated at the Council of Constance (1414–1418).⁴² A French contemporary of Mardach, Jean Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris, expressed a wider institutional concern with this type of behavior at the Council when he read his *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis* (1401) and *De probatione spirituum* to the delegates in 1415. According to Peter Dinzelbacher, these works became the standards by which charismatic men and women were examined thereafter.⁴³ For Gerson, women's claims to visionary experience required extra vigilance on the part of the clergy. As Dinzelbacher asserts: "Only the schooled theologian could, according to Gerson, be the judge of borderline

experiences, even when he himself had never had any.”⁴⁴ Moreover, one of the signs that a woman was not being deceived by the devil was her level of obedience to the office of the clergy (115).

The writings of Dominican reformer Johannes Meyer (1422–1485) also display this suspicion of mysticism among observant women. He writes about the exemplary lives of fourteenth-century nuns recorded first in the *Sisterbooks*, as well as of the reformed fifteenth-century sisters of Schönensteinbach; yet, he also fears that the example of these earlier Dominicans might lead the women under his current supervision to imitate their more excessive ascetic and ecstatic practices.⁴⁵ In his account of the Dominican observance movement, the *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens* (1468), Meyer spends three of the five parts describing the convent life at Schönensteinbach. In part II he explains why he refrained from recording some of the visions and revelations the sisters recounted to him. Not only had the sisters forgotten or doubted the details, but even the *trüwen* (faithful, genuine) visions did not seem to him to be worthy as didactic material. He gives two reasons for this conclusion: First, because he believes it is more instructive and useful to read about virtue than about visions; and, second,

dar umb, daz gar unsicher ist zuo halten, zuo schribent oder zuo sagent von söllichen offenbarungen, wenn wir lesent, daz vil in söllichen sachen betrogen werdent, won als s. Paulus sprichet, ‘so ist sich der bös engel wandlen in die gestalt des guoten engels,’ und dar umb ob ich diser hailgen swöstren leben sag und ain fach, so las ich ain niitze ler vor gon: Ain person, die da hat offenbarung und gesicht, der sol man beschaydenlich warnemen vnd sy beweren by disen VII nach geschribnen zeichen nach der ler der hailgen vätter:⁴⁶

because it is so uncertain to believe, write or speak such revelations, since we read that many are deceived in such things, for as St. Paul says, ‘so has the evil angel transformed into the form of a good angel,’ and for this reason if I speak of and include the lives of these holy sisters, it is because I let a useful lesson proceed from them: A person who has revelations and visions — to her one should listen with discernment and judge them [the visions] with the following seven signs according to the teachings of the holy fathers.

Because judging these visions is inherently difficult, Meyer first discourages revelatory experience in hopes of avoiding the situations that would require such judgment. But the subtext of this recommendation seems to be a more basic trepidation at the prospect of losing some measure of clerical authority and control to devilish influence. Hence, his second recommendation is to test all such material for the presence of seven signs consistent with “the teachings of the holy fathers,” a body of knowledge that is the official domain of learned doctors of the church. Fittingly, then, the first of these signs is: *ob sy lebet under der gehorsami und zucht aines erfarnen, tugentrichen, gaistlichen vatters bewert von der hailgen kirchen* (if she lives in obedience and under the discipline of an experienced, virtuous, spiritual father who is authorized by the holy church).⁴⁷ According to Meyer, a religious woman would be better served by proper, institutionally authorized supervision than by visions.

The tension evident in Meyer’s writings between, on the one hand, wanting to acknowledge God’s grace when it is present and, on the other,

maintaining institutional authority and control also becomes evident in fifteenth-century compilation manuscripts generally. Andrea Syring, studying a different set of manuscripts, argues that the art of *compilatio* enabled producers of devotional compilations to *appear* to be following advice like that given by Meyer when in fact they were not.⁴⁸ Specifically, Syring shows how an anonymous sermon on St. John, copied in a toned down version without its usual mystical content, is then augmented with passages from other mystical texts. Syring suspects that the inserted passages represent an effort on the part of the compiler to “deceive a censor” by incorporating mystical sentiments into a more “harmless” sermon vehicle (132). It is difficult to say with certainty whether this was in fact the strategy of the compiler of the manuscript Syring examines, but it does seem clear that the mixture of conventional didactic texts about proper monastic virtues and practices with potentially suspicious texts about asceticism and associated flights of mystical love reflects an enduring tension between these two aspects of religious life.

This tension was already evident in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when vernacular mysticism first emerged. A number of scholars, most prominently Otto Langer and Kurt Ruh, have argued that the apophatic and speculative theology of Meister Eckhart and other famous fourteenth-century preachers (Tauler and Seuse) was a direct result of this tension and, in particular, a negative response to the excessive ascetic and mystical behaviors recorded in the Sisterbooks.⁴⁹ Eckhart’s philosophies of the absolute poverty of the spirit, the detachment of the soul, the destruction of will, and the liberation of the person from things are thus read as efforts to turn women away from disciplining their own bodies and toward a more internal or abstract mystical experience.⁵⁰ More recently, scholars such as Amy Hollywood and Susanne Bürkle have raised questions about the assumptions on which these readings of Eckhart rest.⁵¹ Langer’s argument, as Bürkle points out, fails to consider either the genre of the Sisterbooks (hagiographical chronicles as opposed to sermons) or the particular conditions of their production and dissemination that occurred chronologically after Eckhart wrote his sermons and treatises for the nuns of the southern German Dominican province.⁵² Eckhart was more likely reacting to the writings of his predecessors Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete, which, as Hollywood argues, are “overtly theological works.”⁵³ Hollywood thus reads the “desomatizing” transformation of “female spirituality” evident in Eckhart’s work as a more thoughtful response to, indeed as an effort to bring together the different mystical paths espoused by his predecessors. In particular, Hollywood sees in Eckhart’s work “an attempt to unify the activity of Mechthild’s loving and suffering soul with the detachment and peacefulness of Porete’s” (7).

Eckhart’s German work is thus not about taming the “crazies” among fourteenth-century Dominican nuns; on the contrary, he radicalizes the new

theology that emerged among women religious in the thirteenth century. In so doing, he does indeed move away from the visionary mysticism we see in Mechthild's book. But the fact that *both* Porete and Eckhart, neither of whom used visions to authorize their ideas, were accused of heresy, and that Porete was burned at the stake, should make this radicality clear. In both cases, a major problem was the potential for dissemination of their ideas to an audience of "simple souls"—that is, women and laypeople lacking theological training who could fall easily into error; Eckhart's vernacular preaching was problematic for this reason, as was Porete's refusal to obey the command to stop distributing her book. What Porete meant by "simple soul" should not be confused with the understanding of her enemies. For her, a simple soul was a soul emptied of all will and thus in a state of perfect union with God's will. She wrote an entire book on how to reach this state and did not think that all people were capable of reaching it. For the authorities who condemned her, "simple souls" refers to the laity and the unlearned religious, those who are ill-equipped to handle sophisticated theological concepts and arguments. Because Porete's book contained sections that could be read by untrained minds as license to forego things like the practice of Christian virtue, attending mass, and the like, the inquisitors were especially concerned about its dissemination. Her condemnation was pursued only upon her continued distribution of her book after having been forbidden to do so. As Hollywood argues, teaching the unlearned "simple souls" how to be annihilated "simple souls," that is, that "the right to speak would be shared and authority constantly subverted through one's depth of detachment and unity with God," enabled a potential subversion of institutional structures of authority—hence the appeal of these teachings to women who had no institutional voice.⁵⁴ However, the Sisterbooks display both the influence of Eckhart's ideas about detachment from the body *and* numerous accounts of ascetic practices, ecstasies, and visions. Hollywood suggests that this mixture reflects a continued and perhaps increased need in fourteenth-century monastic culture for the bodily evidence of female spiritual authorization and not, as Langer would have it, that Eckhart was responding to accounts like these in drafting his philosophy of detachment (203–4).

Although Eckhart was not reacting to the behavior recounted in the Sisterbooks, Eberhard Mardach and Johannes Meyer were. While Jean Gerson and others at the Council of Constance noted with alarm the widespread popularity of Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, Johannes Meyer, reacting to the extreme behavior recorded in the Sisterbooks, edited a copy of the St. Katharinenthal Sisterbook to which he made minor textual changes in addition to attaching a prologue and an afterword containing warnings for the readers.⁵⁵ Indeed, it seems that Langer's interpretation of Eckhart's relationship with women's mysticism is more fitting for fifteenth-century clerics' reception and use of Eckhartian concepts. Both Mardach and Meyer explicitly mistrust and disapprove of ascetic disciplines and visionary

experience. In addition, no doubt inspired by Gerson's important writings on the subject, Mardach also alludes to the Eckhartian concept of *gelassenheit* (detachment) and uses it to mean more simply obedience to and acceptance of God's will as part of his disciplinary program.⁵⁶

Despite this kind of disciplinary writing, or perhaps because of it, the writings of the Dominican preachers, Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse, along with other sermon collections and didactic religious tracts continue to be transmitted in the fifteenth century with writings about the more problematic and suspicious ascetic and visionary aspects of mysticism. This was obviously not a tension that was easily resolved; indeed, the manuscripts indicate that it was a pressure imposed from above by the *Seelsorger* (confessors, priests, preachers) on women and lay religious, and on the books they produced. But the effect of this pressure was to generate a literary culture in which women found creative ways to take an active part—if not as authors, then as producers of books.⁵⁷ Their roles as consumers of religious books facilitated and in some cases, as we shall see, guided their production.

Between Consumers and Producers

KOBLENZ (K)

Johannes Meyer, writing about and for the nuns at Schönensteinbach in 1468, explicitly warns them and their potential confessors that any claims they make to having visions will be examined according to the teachings of the holy fathers. Moreover, he writes that visions will only be trusted if the person who has them lives under the guidance of an “experienced, virtuous, spiritual father who is defended by the holy church.”⁵⁸ Given this kind of framework for observant women, it is perhaps no wonder that a manuscript like the Koblenz codex, which Meckelnborg connects to the convent at Schönensteinbach, places such a heavy emphasis on the words of experienced and virtuous spiritual fathers.

This manuscript is a late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century paper compilation, 172 folios long, in which two independently existing collections were later bound together as a book.⁵⁹ The codex begins with thirteen folios of Latin texts: “The Twelve Councils of Christ”; three prayers to St. Dominic; and a series of six Latin sermons, five of which have been identified by scholars as Meister Eckhart's, though only two are genuine and none actually names Eckhart. After this section, which serves as an introduction to the codex, two long booklets of religious texts follow, which are written in two different Middle High German hands.⁶⁰ Part I consists of a long set of sermons by Eckhart and others (fifty-six folios); a brief section of eighteen short texts

and sayings (five folios); a section of four anonymous mystical tracts, including the chapter from Mechthild's book (II, 23) (nine folios); and, finally, another set of sermons and tracts some of which are attributed to Eckhart and the final tract to a Meister Dietrich (sixteen folios). The German sermons at the beginning of Part I deal with conventional observance topics: poverty, humility, good preaching, Christ's nativity, and the importance of virginity.⁶¹ They also address mystical subjects, including an Eckhart sermon on the birth of God in the virgin soul, two sermons on the Virgin Mary (one anonymous, the other by Heinrich of Löwen), an anonymous sermon on St. John the Baptist and *die liehte der gnaden* (the lights of grace), and another about seeking the lord *in eyne hitziger fuieres begirde* (in a hot fiery desire).⁶² The words of the experienced fathers are thus mingled with the rhythms of both acceptable and potentially dangerous mystical language.

After this long sermon selection, in which the line between observant and mystical topics is quite blurred, we find five folios of eighteen short dialogues, edifying lists, and sayings of the Church fathers. Once again, the compiler heeds the recommendation to obey the "teachings of the holy fathers." The sayings and lists address topics related to monastic life: the dangers of vanity; the benefits of humility; the value of virtues like faith, honesty, and chastity; and the merit of prayer. Of these eighteen short texts, all but four name an authority that is either a local Dominican preacher or bishop (for example, Johannes of Sterngasse, *Bruder Albrecht der brediger bischof* [Albertus Magnus] or Abbot Antonius) or a Church father, saint, or biblical author (Bernard, Gregory, Augustine, or Solomon). It is as if the sermons venturing into the troubled and troubling realm of mystical discourse had to be reined in by the named, experienced, and virtuous spiritual fathers like Albert the Great that follow.

Even more fascinating is the fact that this short section concludes with a poem that possibly reflects on the producer of the compilation. After the lessons attributed to Albert, a first-person narrator offers a poem introduced as follows: "Ich wil sagen mynen sin dar ueber ich gefraget [bin] Des geystes armut" (K, f. 75^r; I want to speak my mind on a question I have been asked, On the Poverty of the Spirit). But it is the closing stanza that speaks to the tension between the teachings of the fathers and the experience of individual souls or brides of God. Invoking Meister Eckhart's legacy in naming the poem after Eckhart's most famous sermon on the poverty of the spirit, the subject here explicitly renounces any claim to an authority equivalent to the master teacher:⁶³

Hie wil ich die rede Ian
Ich han als ein tore getan
Daz ich ieman dar wil fueren
Daz ich nie getorste gerueren
Doch waz es ein antwurte und nyt ein lere

Ich gere nit der meyster ere
Ich han gefraget mynen sin
Darueber also ich gefraget bin
Wie es mir her nach her gan
Daz wil ich alies an got nu lan. Amen
Dis heiß ich armuot des geystes. (K, f. 75^r)

I want to end this speech here. I have acted like a fool, intending to lead someone somewhere, which I would never dare do. However, this was an answer, not instruction. I do not desire the honor of the master/teacher. I have asked myself about something about which I was asked. Whatever happens to me now, I leave in God's hands. Amen. I call this [poem] poverty of the spirit.

We cannot be completely certain about whether the writer of this poem was a man or a woman. The disclaimer of the institutional role of teacher in line six (*Ich gere nit der meyster ere*) could come either from a nun or a lay brother. We need only think of contemporary movements like those initiated by Wycliffe and John Hus to open up the Bible and other forms of religious instruction to a wider audience by translating it into vernaculars to realize that teaching in the vernacular was dangerous for men as well as for women. However, in the light of Meckelnborg's surmise that the codex was produced in an observant women's community, we can perhaps imagine a female scribe or compiler here.⁶⁴ The writer of this stanza appears to be worried about having acted with the authority of a teacher. Claiming this authority without the requisite title of master is "foolish;" attempting to "lead someone somewhere"—that is, to take someone from a place of confusion to one of understanding, or in other words, to teach—is something she would never dare to do. Explaining that she was not teaching, but rather merely answering a question that she had been asked, the writer perhaps anticipates the criticism of a confessor such as Johannes Meyer. The invocation of Eckhart's poverty of the spirit would perhaps confirm that the writer aligns herself with the more abstract and speculative mysticism promoted by Eckhart instead of with the ecstatic mystical behavior described in the Sisterbooks.

With this poem, then, we can imagine the ways in which observant Dominican women came to be involved in the production of mystical handbooks. When questions about spiritual matters arose in the absence of the regular presence of preachers and confessors, the women either assembled texts or had them assembled in order to provide answers to these questions, both for themselves and for each other. Moreover, because of the pressure on them to obey the counsel of their intellectual and religious superiors even when they were not there, the women fill up their books with the "teachings of the holy fathers." These teachings—in the Koblenz manuscript appearing in the form of sermons, sayings, dialogues, and lists—might have functioned to provide an observant balance for the tracts containing references to somatically induced or felt visionary experience in the compilation.

Indeed, as we move into the third section of Part I, four potentially questionable or suspicious mystical texts (including the Mechthild chapter)

follow the poem on the poverty of the spirit. All of them are anonymous. The first is an unfinished piece on the ecstatic heights (*ueberschal*, highest joy) of *Gottesminne*; the second is a tract on the union of God and an “I,” in which we learn that *do er sprach minen hertzen ist beschehen in mynen libe also eyner zerflossen waz* (K, f. 80v; when he spoke, my heart felt in my body like flowing wax); the third is a rhyming prose text about *imitatio Christi*; and the fourth is the Mechthild chapter. As if to mitigate the impact of these eight folios, however, the compiler follows this constellation of texts on mystical love with another series of short Eckhartian texts on poverty and detachment (fourteen folios), and a final short tract about *gelassenheit* by “Meister Dietrich,” identified by scholars as the Dominican theologian, Dietrich of Freiberg (two folios). Significantly, this man is identified in the manuscript as *der groeste pfaffe und der heiligesten man eyner waz, so do uff ertrich lebete* (K, f. 98v; the greatest pastor and one of the holiest men who lived on earth in his day). The earthly authority of the Dominican order and the speculative mysticism its most famous preachers profess thus counterbalance the references to somatic mysticism (that is, feeling like melted wax at God’s presence) and has the last word of Part I.

The chapter from Mechthild’s book (II, 23) used in the third section of Part I is especially fitting for the context of the manuscript in the early Dominican observant reform and the tensions this reform produced. It is a dialogue between an intermediary and the “foolish soul” about the holy lover, Christ. This intermediary comes to the soul with the intention of waking her so that she can go to her lover, but the soul is recalcitrant, she wants to sleep on: “Las mich ungewecket, ich weis nit waz du mir sagest” (K, f. 81r; Don’t wake me, I don’t know what you’re talking about).⁶⁵ When the messenger insists, the soul responds: “Ich bin in eynem heiligen orden, ich vaste vnd wache, ich bin ane haubtsünde, ich bin gnüg gebunden” (K, f. 81v; I am in a holy order, I fast, and perform vigils, I am without cardinal sin, I am bound enough). In the context of Mechthild’s book, this representation of the recalcitrant soul, thinking she is already doing enough for her spiritual well-being, might reflect Mechthild’s view of her fellow beguines who go through the motions of devotion, but who are not really committed to true spiritual growth and achievement. In the context of this manuscript and the observant movement, however, this text might be offering a veiled critique of the reformers. The observant reform was focused primarily on strict obedience to the monastic rule — that is, to fasting in moderation as specified by the rule, to performing vigils, to avoiding sin. But the insertion of texts like this one into a manuscript full of this kind of advice can also be read as a reflection of how the women producers and consumers of these texts viewed even these reforms to be superficial and, as such, insufficient. Perhaps they, like Erhard von Dürningen, saw that little of the devout reading going on was entering the heads of the sisters.

This chapter could also have been read by learned spiritual fathers as an

endorsement of their reform efforts. The recalcitrant soul revels in her relationships with her family and her dear religious friends and expressly states her intention to live according to her own will. Both of these statements would place her firmly in the category of women like Maria of Wolkenstein who were resisting observance reform. In response, the messenger admonishes her: “Des mahtu dich hūte vor gotte schamen, daz du doch treyst geystlichen namen und gast doch alles umbe mit dime lichamen” (K, f. 81v; You should be ashamed today before God that you bear the name religious and yet you busy yourself entirely with your body). Indeed, the excessive obsession with the bodily aspect of religious life (meaning extreme ascetic practices, excessive desire for the Eucharist, and so on) is precisely what Eberhard Mardach criticizes in the letter to his spiritual daughter quoted above. This type of conventional reprimand directed toward the soul potentially offsets the mystical content that might otherwise seem suspect in the eyes of the supervising authority.

Nevertheless, the chapter goes on to endorse the very bypassing of learned spiritual advising that the clergy distrusted. Although venerated women like the Dominican tertiary Catherine of Siena and the women in the Sisterbooks were known to live on the Eucharist alone, as we have seen, men like Eberhard Mardach tried to discourage this kind of bodily manipulation for the purposes of inducing mystical experience, and Johannes Meyer was suspicious of similar accounts from Schönensteinbach nuns. Yet the messenger in Mechthild’s chapter states that the soul was made so noble that *sy nit den got essen mag, der lat noch iren lichamen nyt verwüsten* (K, f. 81v; she is able to eat nothing but God and He does not allow her body to waste away). Moreover, after telling the soul how to prepare for union with her divine lover (she must clean out God’s dwelling place, that is, her soul, of evil habits), the messenger remarks: “Owe, daz duot manig man nyt, der wise ist vnd lere hat und von natürlichen sinnen, daz er sich iht getürre gelegen in die gewalt der nacketen mynnen. Mere die einfaltige[n] reyne[n], die got in allem yrme tuonde luterliche meynent, zuo den muosz sich got natürlichen neygen” (K, f. 82r; Alas, many a man who is wise and has learning and natural reason does not do this; he does not dare to lay himself in the power of naked love. Indeed, it is the simple and pure ones, who love God purely in all their actions, to them God must naturally descend). The preference of God for simple and pure souls over the learned men who confess and advise them is an explicit expression of the sentiment that made fifteenth-century male reformers particularly wary. A mystical union in which God descends past the learned men of the Church to greet the simple souls directly, in Mechthild’s words, to “kiss them thoroughly with His divine mouth,” “to love them with full strength in the bed of love,” and in which they come “into the highest bliss and most loving pain” must certainly have felt potentially excessive to some confessors.⁶⁶ The presence of this chapter in the Koblenz anthology, one of Mechthild’s most vivid and compelling dialogues about union, means that

efforts to control the pursuit of ecstatic states in the fifteenth century met with limited success.⁶⁷

Part II of the Koblenz manuscript, written in a different hand and dialect, seems also both to reflect and address the tension between a male-directed religious life and a direct experience of God. This booklet includes thirty-three short exempla and tracts (sixty-four folios) followed by a life of St. Catherine of Siena (eight folios). Fourteen of the short texts include a citation of an authority, but, in contrast to Part I, no Dominicans are mentioned by name.⁶⁸ Topics of the short texts include the religious virtues to be cultivated by monastics (virginity, chastity, humility, and purity), the passion and suffering of Christ, fasting, the veneration of the Virgin Mary and other saints, and the proper way to confess. Meckelnborg reads these topics as evidence for her contention that the book was made for and perhaps also by women.⁶⁹ But at least half of these texts also discuss the way that devils can insert themselves into the life of the religious, the threat of temptations of all kinds, and the way that various holy men and women were able to fend off devilish temptation. This focus on the devil recalls Jean Gerson's and Johannes Meyer's assertions that mystical experience can rarely be trusted because of the potential for devilish influence. If Meckelnborg's assumption about women consumers *and* producers of this codex is correct, then I would argue only for Part I where there is evidence (in the poem on the poverty of the spirit) of a compiler working to negotiate the censoring efforts of observant friars. Part II, in contrast, seems more likely to have been written by men as part of these efforts to control and limit the intensity of religious women's lives. The thirty-three texts offering detailed instructions on the observance of monastic virtues as well as on the arts and deceptions of the devil precede the life of St. Catherine in the book and theoretically would have been read first.⁷⁰ The compilers of Part II of the Koblenz codex thus place Catherine's *vita*, which is replete with accounts of excessive asceticism and visionary experience, in a textual context that would ensure its being read with restraint.

STUTTGART (S)

The Koblenz manuscript thus intriguingly illustrates the tension between the promotion of books to encourage observance and the anxiety that these books themselves will promote a form of mystical practice that both invites devilish influence and undermines clerical authority. Both parts of the codex are marked by this tension, but, as I have argued, Part I can be read as reflecting a response of a reformed nun to the admonitions of reformers like Mardach, while Part II is aligned with those making the admonitions; it tries to inspire the readers to be both observant and divine lovers like Catherine, but safely. The Stuttgart manuscript, by contrast, written and bound much later (1462), promotes observance less tentatively, perhaps because the mysticism it

advances harks back to the pre-Eckhartian model of the Cistercians and Victorines.⁷¹

The use of this anthology of anonymous texts to edify and guide readers is more straightforward than in K.⁷² The numerous didactic tracts and sermon excerpts in the manuscript instruct on such practical matters as *Drü ding jrrent an ainem volkumen leben*” (S, f. 5r; three things cause error in a perfected life), *Wilt du wissen, ob du syest jn goettlichen gnaden vnd siessikait, das merck ab fier dingen* (S, f. 8v; If you wish to know if you are in divine grace and sweetness, take note of four things), *Dry ding tund die sel wirdeclichen jngon jn vnsern herren jhesum cristum* (S f. 10v; the soul does three things worthily in going to our lord Jesus Christ). The initial eighteen folios address the Cistercian notions of Christ as the soul’s bridegroom, the flowing of divine love, and the powerful jubilation of mystical union *die das hertz nit verbergen mag wenn dass sij mit gewalt uss brichet*. . . (S f. 16v; that the heart cannot conceal, because it erupts with violence). The most often cited authority for these sentiments in these first eighteen folios as well as throughout the manuscript is, not surprisingly, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the founding father of the Cistercian order. Mechthild’s writings, also largely focused on many of these “practical matters,” are in good company here.

Perhaps also because of the strong presence of Bernard, the codex seems to address spiritual people generally, whether they be nuns, lay brothers, monks, or preachers. Bernard wrote his sermons on the Song of Songs for the monks in his order, but the sermons quickly became well-loved by wider audiences. It is generally believed that monks and preachers would not have used vernacular religious books because they had access to both scripture and religious writings in the “original” Latin. By the fifteenth century, though, at least in the eyes of men like the influential Dominican preacher Johannes Nider (1380–1438), all men and women, regardless of vocation, were supposed to be searching for the quickest path to salvation. This path in Nider’s mind was the contemplative, monastic one about which they all could read in his German sermons.⁷³ The best evidence for this view is the set of Nider’s vernacular sermons known as the *Vierundzweinczig guldin Harpffen* (Twenty Four Golden Harps) (1427–1429).⁷⁴ These sermons do not appear in the Stuttgart compilation, but they are relevant for understanding its potential audience. While written at the request of the “*ersamer burgerin*” (honourable women) of Nuremberg, the Nider sermons nevertheless addressed a variety of audiences, including religious men and women, lay men and women, merchants, artisans, and even priests.⁷⁵ As John Dahmus argues, “since . . . Nider gives specific counsel to the clergy in *Harps*, some members of the clergy might very well have used the book for their own benefit as well as for that of the people entrusted to their care.”⁷⁶

The Stuttgart manuscript makes a similar impression. In addition to the Bernardian tracts that begin the compilation, there are fifty five selections taken from the so-called St. Georgener sermon collection (though in a

rearranged order in comparison with the main manuscripts transmitting the collection); many of them are only excerpted in part and some are significantly edited. Most of these sermons, too, use the common instructional method of systematically elaborating lists of things the contemplation of which will help the individual religious (male or female) to be a more observant and good Christian. At least one text seems explicitly directed at men, possibly lay brothers of a monastery.⁷⁷ Other selections, especially those from the St. Georgener collection seem to be directed toward women readers. For example, one sermon excerpt begins: “Mulieres an dem wort sind acht buochstaben, Dar an sellend ir mercken acht tugend” (S, f. 71^v; Women, in this word are eight letters, In these you should note eight virtues). There are also sermons on three kinds of people who love, the two best of which are women who remain widows because of God’s love and chaste women who renounce the world entirely for God’s sake (S, f. 54^v-55^r); and a sermon about the daughter of Syon from the book of Isaiah that is read as a lesson on how to receive Christ as lover (S, f. 83^{r-v}). The use of these exempla in which female roles dominate suggests that the writer also had female listeners or readers in mind.

That this advice for men and women was part of the observant movement is evidenced by the warnings that accompany the Bernardian mystical texts at the beginning of the manuscript. Some warn against excessive bodily disciplines, others against uncontrolled displays of rapture. As explained in one particularly colorful selection:

wan es ist manig mensch dass die gnad und die siessikait die im gott git nit kan behalten und also schier so in unser her ain klain gnad git so lausset er sie zuo hand uss und kan si nit verbergen und lat sich an zuo gaxen das allen sin nachburen es jnnen werdent recht als ain henn die ain aij geleit. Also sellend wir nit tuon. Wir sellend unser minn nit begaxen als die henn . . . (S, f. 16^r)

for there is many a person who cannot contain the grace and sweetness that God gives him and as quickly as our lord gives him a little grace, so he lets it out immediately and cannot hide it and he allows himself to cackle and cluck about it so that all of his neighbours become aware of it, just as a hen who has laid an egg. We should not act in this way. We should not cluck about our love like the hen . . .

While the clucking of a hen laying an egg is an image that must assuredly have resonated with the fifteenth-century audience as an allusion to a chattering woman, the passage uses the more universal *mensch* and masculine pronouns to make the point.⁷⁸ Indeed, even the sermon excerpts and tracts that at first seem more likely to be addressed to women because they use female roles for their allegories tend to offer guidance that applies to any person hoping to be a good Christian. The St. Georgener sermon on the daughter of Syon for example uses the first person plural to indicate what lessons should be taken from that story, and the lessons are not gender specific. Indeed, “we” are supposed to note that it is the Lord who comes to any soul, how He comes to every soul, and how every soul should receive Him (S, f. 83^{r-v}).⁷⁹ Similarly, in the first sermon after the St. Georgener selection, we learn that “Ain jeglich mensch hat fünf tochtren, die jn raitzend zu arbeitend. Die erst jst die natur . .

.” (S, f. 99r; Each individual person has five daughters that motivate him to work. The first is nature . . .). Once again the generic “*mensch*” is the subject of the lesson and the daughters are to be understood not as kinds of women, but rather allegorically as nature, time, place, reward, and modesty. The manuscript thus offers conventional spiritual guidance precisely along the lines that observant reformers felt was necessary: It advocates the development and pursuit of religious virtues to facilitate an *inner* encounter with the divine that would fill the person with joy, but that would not lead to embarrassing public displays.

The placement of the anonymous Mechthild excerpts corresponds to this aim. After six texts on flowing divine love with the accompanying warnings quoted above, the compiler then combines three chapters from *The Flowing Light*, presenting them as one tract bearing the title: *von der sele una von der minne* (S, f. 17v; On the Soul and on Love). The dialogue enacts principles that have been elaborated upon in the preceding tracts. For example, one repeated lesson in the first six texts is that in order to love God truly, the soul must conquer the world of her body: *liplich natur muos undertaenig werden* (S, f. 12r; bodily nature must become subservient). Accordingly, the excerpt from Mechthild starts with a dialogue between the soul and love (I, 1) in which the soul laments all that Lady Love has taken from her (all her earthly property and connections, her childhood, her youth, and her health) after which point the soul realizes that she has gained much more (Love itself, God, and all of heaven). Following directly upon the end of this dialogue are two more short chapters from *The Flowing Light* (I, 9 and 10) that elaborate on the situation the dialogue has just played out. The first of these shorter texts is a statement that “those who burn in true love, who build on the ground of truth, and who bring forth with full hips the fruit of the blessed end, they dwell on high.”⁸⁰ The second describes the soul that God loves as the person who conquers the world, the devil, and, once again the body. In a series of rhyming couplets (italicized) that are typical of Mechthild’s distinctive poetic style, the section is summed up:

Tuot ir die welt ainen *stos*,
da von lidet si kain *not*;
tuot ir das fleisch einen *wank*,
da von wirt der gaist nút *kvank*;
tuot ir der túvel ainen *blick*,
des enachtet die sele aber *niht*.
Si *minnet* und si *minnet*
vnd si nit anders *beginnet* (S, f. 18v).

If the world gives her a push, she suffers no distress from that; if her flesh gives her a kick, the spirit will not grow weak from that; if the devil gives her a look, the soul takes no notice of that. She loves and she loves and she does not begin otherwise.

The lesson is clear: the soul should renounce worldly pleasure and

connections and devote herself to achieving perfection in God's love. Because of their slightly more lyrical quality, the Mechthild texts stand out from the others, indeed perhaps as a kind of punctuation, a way to bring the point home. However, there is no lingering allowed on whatever pleasant contemplations might result from Mechthild's poetry, for the compiler concludes this selection with a reminder that "man sol sich ueben an der demuetikait. Die aller maist verschmaecht sin, dem menschen dem lonet gott aller groestlichest" (S, f. 18v; One should exercise himself in humility. Those who are the most spurned, to that person, to him God gives his greatest reward). Immediately after this concluding sentiment, the compiler places the sermon about the virtues associated with serving at the altar. Mechthild's texts thus help the compiler to temper the lessons on the path to union. They serve as additional reminders that the heights of mystical union sought after by monastic contemplation can only be reached through a measured rejection of the world that nevertheless does not involve leaving the world of religious duty (serving at the altar) behind.

The measured tone of this compilation, in conjunction with the mixed-gender audience it seems to address makes more sense when we realize that the codex, although not authored by a single preacher as was the case with Nider's sermon collection, was in fact written down almost entirely by one man. The scribe of the first 183 of 192 folios identifies himself on the last page he contributes: "Explicit liber iste per petrum editor de rauenspurgo anno domini millesimo quadringentesimo sexagesimo secundo in vigilia sancti bartholomei tunc temporis visitantem in esslingen. Deo Gratias" (S, f. 183v; So ends this book produced by Peter of Ravensburg in the year of our lord 1462 on the vigil of St. Bartholomew (23 August) while visiting in Esslingen. Thanks be to God). Scholars disagree on Peter's religious affiliation. Karl Bihlmeyer believes he is a Carmelite friar because there were Carmelite houses in both Ravensburg and Esslingen in the fifteenth century.⁸¹ More recently, Paul Gerhard Völker assumes the origin of the codex to be a Franciscan house in Esslingen, presumably because the fragment of the Eucharist sermon written onto the last pages of the book (written by another scribe) can be attributed to Konrad Bömlin (ca. 1380–ca. 1449), a Franciscan who first entered the order in Esslingen.⁸² Regardless of which house Peter was visiting or from which house he had come, the fact that Esslingen was a town with houses from all four mendicant orders (Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite, and Augustinian-Eremites)⁸³ means that he was writing for at least one (if not more) of them, and most likely not only for nuns and lay brothers but also for the friars who were responsible for their spiritual care. While the selection from Mechthild in the Koblenz manuscript could represent a moment of measured defiance of the suspicions associated with women's active participation in the observance movement through literary reproduction, the selections used in the Stuttgart manuscript are worked into the pattern of the compilation to encourage proper devotion, but in measured

AUGSBURG (H_A AND M₁)

Whereas the Koblenz manuscript suggests the way a reformed Dominican nun might have responded to the clergy's conflicting messages about religious writing, and the Stuttgart manuscript suggests the response of a particular friar to this conflict, the Augsburg manuscripts show us in more detail how women's responses to and involvement in this movement engendered a vibrant literary culture. Moreover, the Augsburg manuscripts give us explicit evidence of how the observance movement was not limited to the reform of men and women in the monastery, but rather was directed to and influenced by men and women of the world as well. Finally, H_A and M₁ illustrate the process by which the consumption of religious writing led to the further production and resulting dispersal of religious writing. The transmission and editing of a constellation of texts in H_A for inclusion in M₁, a constellation that includes anonymous excerpts from Mechthild's book, demonstrates precisely how texts can be both changed and lost when they become part of the observant literary culture. They thus alert us to another vexing issue for the clerics supervising this movement. The copying and reading of devotional books might help educate those men and women whom the clergy could not supervise daily or in person, but copying and reading also meant that the distribution of texts could quickly extend outside of clerical control.

The first 135 folios of the Augsburg codex (H_A), a hefty manuscript of 404 folios dating from 1464, are taken up by a book by Thomas Peuntner (1390–1439) that teaches *wie wir got unseren herren lieb sullen haben wber alle ding* (H_A, f. 1r; how we should love God our Lord above all things).⁸⁴ The rest of the manuscript (ca 269 folios) contains thirty-four distinct items.⁸⁵ For the purposes of my discussion here, I will touch briefly on the book by Peunter and the letter of recommendation that accompanies it; two texts by Johannes Nider; a text about a devout lay woman, known as “The Little Woman of 21 years”; the penultimate text in the manuscript—a dialogue between a Princess and a lady merchant; and the constellation of texts in which the Mechthild chapters appear.⁸⁶

The booklet by Peuntner with which the manuscript begins is accompanied by a letter by an unnamed Carthusian who strongly recommends the book. According to this letter, the book, though addressed explicitly to nuns, is useful to any and all individuals interested in learning how to love God. For example, the Carthusian admits that it has been more useful to him than all his readings of Scripture: “das vergih ich dir, das ich pis her also gruntlichen vnd also clerlichen nye verstanden hab pey aller der heiligen geschrift die ich gelesen hab vnd auch die ich hab hören lesen, wie man got dynen schol, vnd yn lieb haben ...” (this I say to you, that, in spite of all the

holy scripture that I have read and that I have heard read, I have never so fundamentally and clearly understood how one should serve God and love him until now . . .).⁸⁷ Further, he notes that no one is too learned to benefit from this book: “schol sich nymant schemen diß püchlein zu vber lesen er sey gelert oder vngelert” (no one should be ashamed to read this little book whether he be learned or unlearned).⁸⁸ To prove this point, he notes that a pastor in Augsburg had three copies made of the book and another Carthusian named Fridrich thinks so highly of it that he cannot praise it enough. Clearly, this first item in the codex is appropriate not only for female monastic audiences, but also, as was the case for Johannes Nider’s sermons on the twenty-four harps, for both learned and unlearned monastic men.

Although Ha does not include Nider’s sermon on the twenty-four harps, it does transmit two of his other German works: a sermon on three kinds of married people, and a letter of advice.⁸⁹ Johannes Nider, as the two texts in Ha indicate, extended his considerable reforming energies not only to both male and female religious but also beyond monastic communities. While the second of the two Nider texts included in the compilation is a letter addressed originally to a women’s religious community, most likely the nuns at Schönensteinbach, the first is a sermon about the degrees of virtue achievable in a worldly marriage. Secular marriage and how to be virtuous within it is also the subject of the nineteenth text in the compilation, “The Little Woman of 21 Years.” Related to the legends about Meister Eckhart’s daughter that culminate in the Sister Katherine Treatise, this story tells of an *efrawen* (wife) who stops a theological Magister to ask him what she, a married woman, must do to achieve perfection and truth.⁹⁰ In the subsequent dialogue, the theologian learns of the woman’s devotions and finds them so perfect and moving that he cries. He then says that if she has managed to pursue this path while married with children, then she deserves praise and honor in the world. In the end, he asks her to pray for him. A married woman outside of the cloistered setting thus proves to be more observant and virtuous than a schooled master of theology.

Although the codex was written down by Johannes K of Bopfingen, who names himself no less than three times in the manuscript (Ha, f. 135r, 301v, and 352v), on the inside front cover we learn that “Daz buch gehort gen Kyrchen zü gebruch S. Madalenen von Oettingen eptysin daselbs und ist fraw Agneßen von Werdenberg gewesen ir mütter selg” (This book belongs to Kirchheim for the use of Sister Magdalena of Oettingen, abbess of same [Kirchheim] and used to belong to Agnes of Werdenberg, her blessed mother). The original owner and most likely also the person who commissioned the manuscript was thus *not* in a religious order. Countess Agnes of Werdenberg (1418–1471) was the daughter of Count Eberhard III who descended from a long line of the counts of Montfort.⁹¹ Agnes’s first marriage was to Count Ludwig XI of Oettingen in 1420. After Ludwig died (1440), she married Wilhelm IV Schenk of Schenkenstein upon Hohenburg.

As a married noblewoman, she was nevertheless very interested in acquiring religious books, most of which she eventually gave to her daughter.⁹² Indeed, there are three other manuscripts from Kirchheim bearing the same ownership attribution in the Augsburg collection.⁹³ The Cistercian convent at Kirchheim was founded by the family of Oettingen and was the oldest of their foundations.⁹⁴ Because Magdalena was the daughter of Agnes and her first husband, the count of Oettingen, it is not surprising that Magdalena entered the convent in Kirchheim, becoming its abbess in 1446, nor that her mother's books were left to the convent in her daughter's care.⁹⁵

While Ha ends up in a convent library, the details of its ownership illustrate the importance of secular women in the literary economy that sprang up around the observance reform. The countess Agnes commissioned this book for her daughter who was actively trying to reform the Kirchheim house.⁹⁶ The Oettingens also founded religious houses in neighboring Christgarten (a Carthusian house) and Maihingen (a Brigittine house). The Carthusians were well-known for their care of and for books and were also the only religious order that never needed reform. The Oettingens' support of that house would thus have had a direct effect on its ability to purchase, produce and care for manuscripts. Indeed, the patrons may also have influenced what was purchased and produced.⁹⁷ Another manuscript from nearby Tegernsee identifies the author of the letter accompanying Peuntner's book as *ein wolgelerter sälliger kartuser. . . der was zw kristgarten pey nörling in kartuser kloster* (a very learned, blessed Carthusian who was in the Carthusian monastery near Nördlingen).⁹⁸ If we consider Agnes's family connections, it seems plausible that the countess heard about Peuntner's useful book through this Carthusian in the Christgarten house that her family had founded and perhaps this is how Johannes K was engaged to include it in Ha.

Although Johannes does not claim in his scribal comments that the countess commissioned the compilation nor that she influenced the contents, there is another text in the compilation that supports these assumptions. The penultimate tract in the Ha codex is a dialogue between a princess and a merchant's wife about a rosary made out of gemstones.⁹⁹ The presence in the dialogue of a noblewoman (princess) might alone suggest that the countess had something to do with the inclusion of this text in the compilation. But there is also a statement at the beginning of the dialogue that supports this hypothesis: "Diß hernach geschriben buochlin habend gemacht die kartauser zue dem guotterstain vnd habend es geschenckt mit dem pater noster der dar inn berürt wirt in ainem clainen kistlin zue totgaub der elteren von wirttenberg anno 1447 ze aurach" (Ha, f. 353r; The Carthusians of Güterstein made the little book written in the following pages and they gave it with the pater noster that is touched upon therein in a little box as a Godparent present to the von Württemberg parents in the year 1447 in Aurach). According to a study by Friedrich Schmidt, the monastery, acting in the role of Godparents, gave this present to Ludwig I of Württemberg and Mechthild, Countess of the Rhine

Palatinate (1419–1482), for their newborn daughter Elisabeth (1447–1505).¹⁰⁰ The Countess Mechthild was a contemporary of Agnes of Werdenberg and was known not only for her patronage of literary culture (Hermann of Sachsenheim dedicated his tale, *Die Mörin* to her) but also for her support of observance in monasteries.¹⁰¹ But their connection was familial as well. Mechthild named her daughter after her husband's aunt, Elisabeth, who in turn had married one of Agnes's brothers, Johann II, Count of Werdenberg.¹⁰² Agnes was thus an aunt by marriage to the younger Elisabeth. Because Agnes was interested in all manner of religious books, it is possible that after learning of the dialogue in question through her family connections, she asked Johannes K to add it to the Ha compilation. Bernhard Schnell also remarks that Johannes K might be a Johannes Kubach who died as a Carthusian in Güterstein in 1477.¹⁰³ The Güterstein Carthusians are mentioned in the dedication to the Princess dialogue quoted above. If Agnes thus knew of the text through her niece or grandniece, Johannes K knew how to obtain a copy, being associated with the Carthusian house where it was first produced.

The Ha codex reveals a devout, secular noblewoman who was involved in the composition of a devotional anthology, thus providing us with a concrete example of how women participated in the explosion of literary production in the fifteenth century. It also reveals continued traces of the vexing questions raised by women reading in the observant context. As was the case with the Würzburg manuscript discussed in Chapter 3, Ha shows us concretely how individual compositions can be revised and changed (traditional philological scholarship calls this “corruption”) when transmitted in anthologies. The context of the observance movement helps us to understand why these changes are made. The most noteworthy of the changes are the choices the compiler makes here with regard to the Mechthild dialogue between the Queen (the soul) and Lady Minne (love) (I,1). First, the chapter is aptly retitled *der mynnen chrieg mit der sel* (“The Battle of Love with the Soul). Clearly meaning to instruct readers on the proper mental preparation necessary for receiving the Eucharist during mass, the compiler then creates a context for the *mynnen chrieg* dialogue by placing it together with *die guldin regel*, a short tract about confession and three short excerpts from disparate chapters in Mechthild's book. The Mechthild excerpts address the related topics of (1) *Do unnsere herr zuo himel fuor do empfieng in der vatter* (V, 27: 4–11; how the Father received the Son in heaven); (2) *Sibenerlai mynne und lieb* (III, 24: 22–27; seven kinds of love), the first of which is *lauffet stettliclichen zuo got* (Ha, f. 240r; runs steadfastly to God); and (3) *Von dem Sacrament* (III, 15: 10–24; on the sacrament).¹⁰⁴ One and a half leaves left blank between *Sibenerlai mynne* and *Von dem Sacrament* indicate that the compiler had plans to add another text to the constellation, but never did.

When compared to the Einsiedeln manuscript (E), which contains *The Flowing Light* in its entirety, all three of the Mechthild excerpts show significant variations beyond the usual orthographical differences. Words and

sometimes phrases that appear in the version that comes down to us in E are absent in Ha.¹⁰⁵ The first line in *Sibenerlai mynne* just quoted, for example — *Ain getrewe mynn lauffet stettlichen zuo got* (A faithful love runs steadfastly to God) comes up in the earlier Einsiedeln version as *Die getrüwe minne hat zuo gotte ein stete lop* (III, 24: 22; Faithful love has steadfast praise for God).¹⁰⁶ What in the E version represents a state of mind or a feeling becomes in Ha an action. In E, the soul feels steadfast praise for God, in Ha, the soul's love runs faithfully to God. But the changes to the third excerpt, *Von dem Sacrament*, give us the clearest insight into how a religious writer would reframe Mechthild's writings both for observant readers and in the light of observant fears about the effects of reading mystical texts. In the Einsiedeln and Colmar versions, the chapter begins with an address to foolish beguines who go to communion out of habit and without the proper mental attitude. Mechthild is so annoyed and ashamed by this behavior that she herself feels unworthy of communion and instead prays to God for guidance. His response is given in a first-person quotation: "Werlich, gast du mir vor mit demueticgem jamer und mit heligen vorhten, so muos ich dir volgen als die hohe fluot der tieffen mülen. Gast du mir aber gegen mit blueender gerunge der vliessender minne, so muos ich dir gemuossen und mit miner gotlicher nature berueren als min einige kúniginne" (III, 15: 10–14; Truly, if you go before me with humble lamentations and holy fear, then I must follow you as the high flood follows the deep millstream. If you approach me, however, with the blossoming desire of flowing love, then I must enlighten you and caress you with my divine nature as my only queen). The corresponding passage from Ha supplies no context of a beguine worrying about the behavior of others; rather, it changes the first-person quotation of God into an instructional address to the reader. In the process, it also paraphrases the more vivid imagery of the older version. The instructive voice tells the reader as before that if she goes before the lord with humble lamentation, "So muoß er dir uolgen von der hüchi hernider" (Ha, f. 241r, emphasis added; then he must follow you down from above). The editor of the Ha fragments deems the likening of God's pursuit of the soul to a flood following a deep streambed as best omitted and instead paraphrases more simply or literally—"down from above." Similarly, if the reader of Ha should approach God with a blossoming desire, there should be no talk of enlightenment or caresses for God's only queen; rather, *so muoß er dir begegnen* (Ha, f. 241v; then he must meet you). The lesson is much more plainly spoken and perhaps therefore safe. Desire for God will result not in a courtly caress but rather in a simple encounter.

In the Einsiedeln version, Mechthild replies to God by saying that she must announce her presence to Him by taking communion despite her feelings of unworthiness. This statement does not appear in Ha at all. Furthermore, her description of what happens when she does approach the altar, written as a first-person narrative, is transformed into a second-person address to the reader and shortened. The passage in E thus begins: "Do gieng ich zuo gottes

tische in einer edeln schar, die bewarten mich vil trúwelich und hielten mich doch vil sere ze vare. Dú warheit ruegete mich, dú vorhte schalt mich, dú schamme geiselte mich . . .” (Ill, 15: 17–19; Then I went to God’s table among a noble throng, they watched over me faithfully, but also held me to the path with much pain. The truth reproached me, fear scolded me, shame scourged me . . .). In E, Mechthild’s first-person account allows her readers to imagine experiencing the narrative along with her. The more extensive passage also provides a frame within which to understand what happens—the noble throng protects her but also exposes her to a variety of criticism and pain. The criticism and pain were reasons to feel virtuous and devout because they connected the suffering individual with the scorn and suffering Christ experienced in the passion. The Ha composer does not invite the reader into an experience of blissful pain, however. On the contrary, he simply informs the reader what will happen to her when she reaches the altar: “So du zuo gotteß tisch gast die warhait rüget dich die forcht behaltet dich die scham gruselt dich” (Ha, f. 241v; When you go to God’s table, truth reproaches you, fear contains you, shame horrifies you . . .). The composer also makes significant changes beyond the narrative voice. For example, fear does not scold the supplicant as it did in the E version, but rather “contains” her. The word *behalten* also connotes the ideas of preserving and saving. This change is thus particularly telling in the light of the observant clergy’s concerns about women’s excesses. While the end result of the journey to the altar for communion is the same — both versions end with divine union and consolation—the Ha version is remarkable in that it omits all reference to lyrical flights as well as to the uncontrollable spiritual journeys to which they might lead. As a result, it provides a shorthand version of the chapter as a direct and controlling instruction to the reader.

While editors such as those involved with the version of Mechthild’s chapters in Ha aimed to dampen enthusiasms that might lead to unruly mystical outbursts, their fears were unable to contain the unruly dispersal of texts that resulted from the particular conditions of the observance movement. The related Augsburg manuscript M₁ illustrates precisely how the need for reading material created by the perceived need for guidance in the reform led to a relatively uncontrollable dispersal of written texts that may also have made authorities uneasy. In this case, a part of one compilation (Ha) is edited and copied into another (M₁), which, because of the other different texts it contains, takes on a completely different character.¹⁰⁷

Indeed, M₁ is a 311-folio manuscript that is dominated by the writings of Johannes Tauler and Meister Eckhart and that also includes four folios from a Heinrich Seuse text—in other words, it is plainly a Dominican manuscript like K as opposed to the Cistercian style books we saw in S and Ha. M₁ begins with a long series of twenty-four Tauler sermons (141 folios). The rest of the manuscript includes sets of anonymous pseudo-Eckhart tracts, three additional Tauler sermons interspersed throughout the manuscript, a tract on the spiritual

path identified by scholars as Rulman Merswin's (Merswin was a prominent figure in the lay religious group known as the "Friends of God"); a chapter from Seuse's *vita*, texts on spiritual wealth, the Pater Noster, and the nine choirs of angels; excerpts from Eckhart's talks on *Unterscheidung* (discernment) and *Abgescheidenheit* (detachment), a fragment of a text by Hendrik Herp called *Spiegel der Vollkommenheit* (Mirror of Perfection), one chapter from Mechthild's book (I, 1), and two short mystical texts that Ha also transmits. Once again, aside from citations to authorities like St. Bernard or Dionysius, there are no authorial attributions in this manuscript.

Written in 1474, ten years after the Ha codex, M₁ transmits the same Mechthild chapter that S and Ha transmit—the opening chapter of Mechthild's book (I, 1). Unlike Ha and S, however, M₁ displays no explicit signs of the manuscript's origin and subsequent ownership. Therefore, we cannot with certainty speak of a female compiler or commissioner. However, it is clear that Ha and M₁ are related, for the Mechthild chapter bears the same title in both manuscripts, *Der mynne krieg mit der selen* ("The Battle of Love with the Soul") (M₁, f. 305^v), a title that diverges from that found in S (*Von der sele und von der minne*, S, f. 17^v). Further, both manuscripts also transmit two other short texts: *Unterscheid zwischen genad und nataur* ("The Distinction between Grace and Nature") and *Ain gaistlich himelfart* ("A Spiritual Ascension").¹⁰⁸ Based on a philological comparison of the two versions of *Der mynne krieg*, Bernhard Schnell has argued that Ha could have been the direct source for the Mechthild section in M₁.¹⁰⁹ The common transmission of the *Unterscheid* and *Himelfart* texts, which Schnell does not mention, supports this claim. The relationship between Ha and M₁ made evident by these parallel transmissions, the fact that both manuscripts are written in eastern Swabian dialects, and the appearance of both codices in the same library after the secularization of the monasteries in 1803 thus give us insight into a specific instance of literary exchange in late fifteenth-century religious houses. Because we know that one of the manuscripts was owned by Countess Agnes and because she passed the book on to the convent for her daughter's use, we can perhaps also assume that either Agnes lent it to another house before giving it to her daughter or her daughter the abbess lent it to someone from inside or outside the house at Kirchheim, who then copied *Der mynne krieg*, *Unterscheid*, and *Himelfart* into M₁.

This "productive consumption" of the Ha constellation in M₁ is further demonstrated by the M₁ compilers' important compositional decisions with regard to the source. In Ha, the constellation includes seven texts; Ha's Johannes K follows the *Der mynne krieg* excerpt with the text titled *Die guldin regel hat syben cappitel* ("The Golden Rule Has Seven Chapters"), the three other excerpts from Mechthild's book (*Do unser herr zuo himel fuor*, *Sibenerlai mynne* and *Von dem Sacrament*), and then *Unterscheid* and *Himelfart*. In M₁, however, the compiler chooses to copy only three texts from this constellation: *Der mynne krieg* followed by *Unterscheid* and

Himelfart. The three other Mechthild texts, already edited and reduced in Ha, are thus completely lost in the transmission from Ha to M₁. This “consumption” may not seem particularly productive. However, we must also note that the textual setting in M₁ for the shared texts is decidedly different. Whereas Ha conveys a Cistercian spirituality with worldly accents, M₁ presents a more speculative Dominican program, as the predominance of Eckhart and Tauler texts in the manuscript indicates. The transfer of these three texts and the omission of the three others from the Cistercian to the Dominican context thus also qualifies as productive consumption. The compiler of M₁ is less interested in a union achieved through love and represented in the celebration of the Eucharist and therefore chooses not to include the three Mechthild excerpts related to the Sacrament. The thrust of the new constellation here is rather the importance of learning about detachment from the world and the resulting apophatic union. Two texts before the Mechthild excerpt is a text about the *sterben von aller begird zeitlicher ding* (M₁, f. 241r; the death of all desire for worldly things); the text immediately before Mechthild’s outlines the *siben gaub des hailigen gaistes mit underschaide gaistlicher lere und tugent* (M₁, f. 297r; seven gifts of the Holy Spirit with the help of the discernment of spiritual teaching and virtue); Mechthild’s dialogue is about a soul lamenting the loss of worldly connections and things; and the *Himelfart* text teaches the individual that if she leaves *alle zeitliche ding so gastu aus der welt . . . und wirst dardurch gefürt in den vater* (M₁, f. 306v; all worldly things, then you will leave this world . . . and will be therefore led into the Father). The M₁ compiler takes only three of the seven texts in Ha’s constellation but redirects their meaning by placing them in a new context—the common monastic notion that one must renounce the connection to the physical world in order to be led into union with the divine, here conveyed by texts associated primarily with Dominicans.

The use of the same texts in books associated with different orders indicates yet another level on which the tensions produced by the observance movement were operating. Indeed, it denotes a lack of restriction on copying practices. There appeared to be some latitude with regard to the transmission of ideas associated with different orders that, as we have seen, was not always present between religious and their spiritual guides. If observant reformers desired stricter adherence to the rules of a particular religious order, the producers of devotional handbooks they inspired were obviously less particular about which order supplied the literature that laid out the rules. This latitude explains how Mechthild’s writings transmitted anonymously could be used in such diverse compilations. Further, this lax attitude toward sources must have played a role in women’s ability to be involved in the production (Ha) and reproduction (M₁) of devotional books, even though in these instances women themselves did not put pen to paper. Clerics like Erhard von Düringen must have felt increasingly uneasy with the explosion of literary

reproduction resulting from increasing numbers of devout readers, especially when what was produced so easily transgressed the doctrinal boundaries associated with different religious orders. Yet, because of the shortages of sufficiently trained and experienced spiritual fathers, there was no way to restrict the “productive consumption” of manuscripts to which Ha and M₁ bear witness.

The reform movement engendered a need for religious guidance, especially among religious women, that provided the “market” for the devotional handbooks collecting Mechthild’s chapters. As Countess Agnes’s book (Ha) makes clear, women’s roles as consumers made them into producers, even if indirectly, and as M₁ illustrates, these productions themselves could spawn countless anthologies for numerous and varied audiences (in this case, a Cistercian book is raided for material for a Dominican book). The result was a situation in which books meant on some level to restrict religious behavior produced an unruly system of literary exchange that could escape restriction.

Death by Consumption: Late Medieval Anthologies and the Loss of Authorship

The evidence provided by the devotional handbooks I have discussed leads to a simple conclusion. The written material collected and consumed in the observant context was profoundly unstable. As we have seen, this instability resulted from a number of competing pressures. Observant spiritual supervisors compelled to instruct their numerous charges produced compilations that would act in their absence (S). Anxieties about the surrender of their own authority, especially to women readers, influenced both what they included in the books and how they edited that content (S, part II of K, and Ha). The desires and needs of women readers put a counterpressure on the books. The producers of Part I of K disguised the mystical contents of their compilation between the words of famous learned preachers. Countess Agnes exerted a pressure on the contents of Ha (the princess dialogue, perhaps also the “Little Woman of 21 years” exemplum) that Johannes K balanced with the modification of Mechthild’s *Von dem Sacrament*. In addition, the changes made in M₁—the omission of some texts, while reinscribing the ones retained into a new context—allude to the way that this instability bred more instability. Indeed, the explosion of literary production in the fifteenth century is both a cause and the direct result of this instability.

The seven manuscripts that I discuss in conclusion (Mü, Mü₂, Mü₃, Mü₄, Ka, M₂, and H),¹¹⁰ all of which transmit the same chapter of Mechthild’s book (I, 22) as part of a popular collection of over 250 sayings attributed in one manuscript to a scribe named Engelhart of Ebrach,¹¹¹ allow us to reflect in a more general way on this volatile system of literary exchange. The pattern of

transmission they reveal to us sheds new light on the relationship between what German scholarship calls the *Zerstreuung* or “scattering” of medieval texts in medieval manuscripts and a more historically specific understanding of the concept and function of authorship in late medieval culture. Because Mechthild’s chapter, as well as many others in the *Spruchsammlung*, is transmitted anonymously, these seven manuscripts tell us little about the problem of female authorship as it relates to the Mechthild transmission, but they do help us to understand with greater specificity how Mechthild’s text and reputation as a holy woman were obscured. Of the seven manuscripts examined here, all of them contain the part of the *Spruchsammlung* with the Mechthild chapter; four contain only the *Spruchsammlung* as a book in itself, while the three others transmit sections of the *Spruchsammlung* with a variety of other texts. Like Mechthild’s book, the Ebrach compilation also undergoes disintegration resulting from its transmission and “productive consumption.” Initially enjoyed as a coherent collection, it is transmitted after a time only as pieces of larger anthologies. It is, in effect, scattered to the four winds.

The pattern of transmission demonstrated by my sampling of seven manuscripts thus poses a larger puzzle, for it points to the potential existence of countless other manuscripts containing small pieces of the *Spruchsammlung* without the Mechthild chapter. The *Spruchsammlung* becomes unstable, too, as it is dispersed in increasingly smaller pieces until all memory of it as a coherent entity fades. This pattern of transmission confirms the hypothesis that this volatile system of production and transmission has little room for named authors unless they bear an authority that can exert pressure on the production or reception of the books in one reforming direction or another. However, because even the texts identified by scholars as Eckhart’s or Tauler’s are more often than not transmitted anonymously, the *Spruchsammlung* and its transmission suggest that the focus for further research should be shifted toward the fate of particular compilations. As my brief sketch of the *Spruchsammlung* transmission will reveal, we still lack a comprehensive manuscript list for the *Spruchsammlung* and a complete account of its *Zerstreuung*. Indeed, a more detailed analysis of such information would give us much needed information about the *Spruchsammlung* as a genre and form. My comments here, however, are limited to the transmission pattern suggested by a sampling of *Spruchsammlung* manuscripts in an effort to illuminate the dissemination of Mechthild’s book more clearly.

Hans Neumann’s critical edition lists three manuscripts (Mü, Ka, and M₂) that transmit Mechthild’s chapter I, 22 within the Ebrach *Spruchsammlung*.¹¹² In the course of my research, I came across four other manuscripts containing the *Spruchsammlung* that also transmit this chapter—three from Munich (bearing the signatures Munich, Cgm. 116, 172, and 411, which I have labelled Mü₂, Mü₃, Mü₄, respectively; See Appendix A and Figure 4, showing I, 22 in Mü₃) and one from Heidelberg (Heidelberg, cpg. 418, which

I have called H), making a total of seven.¹¹³ Of these seven, four transmit only the Spruchsammlung, and, of these four, three were written down on parchment (Mü, Mü₂, and Mü₃) and one on paper (H), all in the fourteenth century.¹¹⁴ Despite slight variations, the Spruchsammlung remains essentially intact in these initial manuscripts. In the fourteenth century, then, it was clearly held to be a coherent unit that was to be transmitted as such.¹¹⁵

This trend changes in the fifteenth century. Both the Karlsruhe manuscript (Ka) and another Augsburg codex (M₂) collect the complete Spruchsammlung, but bind it together with other booklets. Ka collects three other booklets written by different hands between the years 1442 and 1444.¹¹⁶ The collection thus maintains its integrity, but becomes part of a larger and new constellation created by the codex. The sayings must have been thought to complement the two sets of sermons and the Pater Noster exegesis included in this larger compilation.

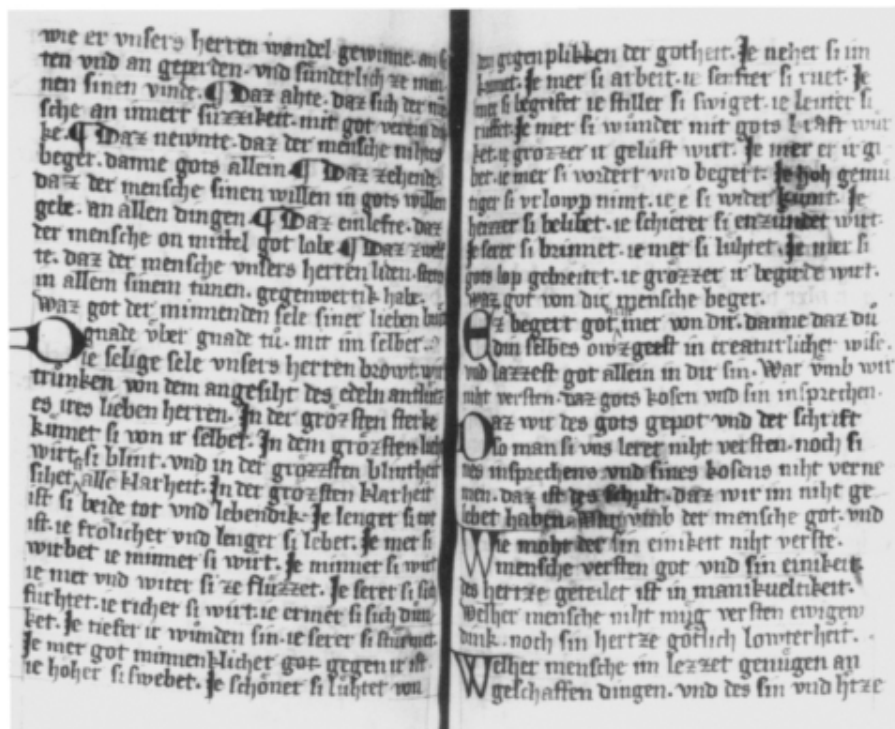


Figure 4. Folios 40^v-41^r of Cgm. 172, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Though dated much later (after 1475), M₂ presents us with a similar book.¹¹⁷ This compilation consists of two parts bound together. The first part consists primarily of the Spruchsammlung in its complete form with a section from Seuse's *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* and an unfinished excerpt from the Gospel of John appended onto the end. The second part is a separate compilation, probably made in a different place but with similar content.¹¹⁸

Recalling the way Mechthild's writings are collected with other texts in W, B, and C, we can see that the transmission of the *Spruchsammlung* follows a similar pattern. Just as Mechthild's writings are legitimized by Latin titles and biblical quotations in W, or various saints' lives in C, so also is the *Spruchsammlung* augmented with more substantive material such as sermons and commentaries to meet the needs of observant readers.

The need for augmenting a booklet like the *Spruchsammlung*, the need to surround it with other types of instructive material thus marks the first step in the breakdown of the collection in its subsequent transmission. Mü4, the first of our seven manuscripts to copy only excerpts from the original 250 sayings of the *Spruchsammlung*, marks the onset of this breakdown. According to Spamer, forty-two sayings are missing from throughout the collection, although the Mechthild chapter is still included.¹¹⁹ The scribe, Jerome Müller, finished writing this impressive compilation, so he writes, on his thirteenth birthday (St. Valentine's Eve, 1436).¹²⁰ The *Spruchsammlung* takes up only about the middle third of the manuscript (85^{ra}-150^{va} of a total 199 folios). The rest consists of similar short mystical texts, prayers, sermon fragments, excerpts from the *Vitaspatrum*, exempla about Christ as a cook and as a merchant, Tauler sermons, a spiritual ABC, and a tract on the daughter of Syon. It is a very lively devotional handbook, which, like many of the other observant manuscripts examined in this chapter, the scribe addresses to a female reader.¹²¹

While Jerome Müller copies a thinned-out version of the *Spruchsammlung*, he nevertheless maintains the integrity of the collection in his compilation. That is, all of his selections from the *Spruchsammlung* are copied together in one section of the manuscript. However, researching the seven manuscripts I consider here revealed references in catalogues to the inclusion of choice texts from the collection (*not* including the Mechthild chapter) in numerous other devotional handbooks from the fifteenth century. Among the medieval German manuscripts catalogued in the library at the University of Augsburg, for example, there are twelve (in addition to M2) that transmit at least one text and often several texts from the *Spruchsammlung*.¹²² A sampling from two volumes of the catalogue of German manuscripts in the Munich State Library reveals twenty-two manuscripts containing fragments of the *Spruchsammlung*.¹²³ The catalogue description for the *Spruchsammlung* in Ka refers to a parallel transmission of one of its texts in a St. Gallen manuscript and the catalogue from St. Gallen in turn references a codex in Vienna.¹²⁴ Finally, Adolf Spamer lists two manuscripts with excerpts from the *Spruchsammlung* in Berlin and two in Basel.¹²⁵

The evidence of the *Spruchsammlung*'s transmission given here is, as I have indicated, far from comprehensive. Given the considerable popularity reflected in this sampling of libraries, however, it seems safe to assume that the *Spruchsammlung* is represented in the compilation manuscripts of countless other libraries. The way that the *Spruchsammlung* becomes

dispersed in these later fifteenth-century handbooks is clearly symptomatic of the pattern of transmission generated by the observance movement, a pattern that Mechthild's book follows as well.

The relationship between Mechthild's book and the *Spruchsammlung* also allows us to think differently about the significance of *The Flowing Light* as a compilation itself. Indeed, despite the fact that no fifteenth-century copies of the entire book survive, it seems that taken as a whole — that is, as a collection of texts of varying form and content, but with an overall religious didactic aim—it was a model for the kind of devotional handbook that came into such high demand in the fifteenth century. There is in fact textual evidence that the proverb-based religiosity evident in the *Spruchsammlung* as well as in the manuscripts that transmit it only in fragments was known to Mechthild in the thirteenth century and was part of her vocabulary as well. A short saying in the *Spruchsammlung* also appears in a Mechthild chapter in a slightly altered form. In the *Spruchsammlung*: *Es ist kein sunde so klein noch so grosz, es sie der tēfel ir genoz* (Mü, f. 3^v). In *The Flowing Light*. *Die sūnde si klein oder gros, der tūfel ist ie ir genos* (V, 16: 5–6; Be the sin small or great, the devil is always its mate).¹²⁶ This correspondence suggests that Mechthild, too, was writing at times for a non-Latinate audience who depended on the pithy proverb or modified sermon excerpt for their practice and maintenance of religious virtue. Mechthild's use of this saying is further evidence for my argument that she chose to write in the vernacular in order to reach an audience not limited to monastic or clerical circles (see Chapter 1). It also suggests that, while Mechthild is surely drawing on the ideas about mystical and courtly love from the twelfth century, she must nevertheless be considered as ahead of her time; for she participates in composing a compendium of original religious instruction and contemplative material first, in the vernacular and second, in a form that was relatively new.

Mechthild's book can thus be seen as taking part in the initiation of a tradition of textual production and reading practices to which the manuscripts I have discussed in this chapter owe their existence. Our increased understanding of how these books work and for whom they work gives us greater insight into how to read and interpret Mechthild's book; it is a book not only bearing witness to a dialogue with God, but also meant to instruct through the dialogic reading and contemplation of poetic conversations between mystical lovers, vision narratives, and sayings. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the precarious and volatile system of literary exchange transmitting Mechthild's book also creates the material conditions for its loss. As we have seen, religious superiors in the fifteenth century were clearly anxious about the effectiveness of devotional compilations; some worried that the many texts they copied were read and recited endlessly but never entered the heads of the readers (Erhard von Dürning), while others feared the assertion of illegitimate or devilish visionary authority (Gerson, Mardach, Meyer). In such a climate, with the condemning and burning of Hussites in

the background and when observant reform was not universally accepted, it stands to reason that writers and compilers would refrain not only from claiming authorship themselves but also from naming any author other than a Church father or a well-established local office-holder. In such a climate it would make sense that Mechthild's writings would be of interest to both sides of the tensions produced by the observant movement to the men and women in search of inspiring contemplative and mystical material and to the men hoping to promote spiritual renewal without encouraging excessive religious behavior. It also makes sense that Mechthild's notoriety as a holy woman and author would fade from the public consciousness.

The manuscript transmission of anonymous excerpts from Mechthild's book helps us to understand how the problem of female authorship that we saw emerging in the early transmission of her book (especially in the Latin translation) is replaced by the equally vexing question of women readers. The tension arising from the promotion of a female-authored book about God gives way to the tension arising from women reading and producing books about mystical love and religious life in the absence of clerical authority. In both cases, Mechthild's writings prove important enough to include. Paradoxically, the conditions of that inclusion, the complex and volatile context of the observance movement, result in an explosion of literary production that scatters the fragmentary remains of *The Flowing Light* into oblivion.

Historicizing Canonicity: Tradition and the Invisible Talent of Mechthild of Magdeburg

S. Mechtildis,) Eine heilige Jungfraw / ist nicht allein
trefflich gelehrt / sondern auch mit einem
Prophetischen Geist begabet gewesen . . .

Saint Mechthild—A holy virgin, was not only
exquisitely learned but also gifted with a prophetic
spirit.

—Johann Frawenlob (1631)¹

. . . *Everything is relentlessly immediate* in this
marriage of the unknowable, which can never be
evaded once it has been experienced.

—Luce Irigaray (1974)²

What has happened to Mechthild of Magdeburg's book in the modern era? Although the late medieval mystical handbooks leave us with the receding of Mechthild's name and authorship into a complex textual culture shaped by observant readers and their nervous spiritual guides, the story of her "cultural capital" does not end there.³ Since sixteen extant Middle High German manuscripts all descend from copies of Heinrich of Nördlingen's 1345 translation, the "loss" of Mechthild's named authority in these books leads to a break in Heinrich's legacy. However, the history of the Latin *Lux divinitatis* continues into the seventeenth century and provides an interesting contrast. As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, the German devotional and observant manuscripts construct a textual tradition of religious literature that foregrounds dialogue with God and the observance of religious virtue as opposed to earthly authorship. The transmission of the Latin version extends the attitudes toward female authorship exhibited by the editors in its prologue; just as this prologue sets Mechthild's prophetic authorship in the context of biblical female prophets in order to legitimize it, the two Latin manuscripts (Rb and Ra), a sixteenth-century translation back into German (Rw), and a seventeenth-century pamphlet about learned women all present Mechthild as part of a tradition of extraordinary and holy women.⁴ These books construct traditions, imagined at least in part in terms of gender, though for varying

purposes. Nevertheless, despite being part of traditions in which she is named, Mechthild's authorship fades from this transmission, too. Because the Latin transmission comes to include other Latin mystical works appearing in Latin by Hildegard of Bingen, Elisabeth of Schönau, Gertrud the Great, and, most importantly, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Mechthild of Magdeburg's name becomes conflated with Mechthild of Hackeborn's and the particularity of her writings is lost. While the name of Saint Mechthild continues to figure in early modern German and Latin prayer books, the *Lux divinitatis* falls out of circulation.

Mechthild's "oblivion" lasts until the second half of the nineteenth century, when Carl Greith finds Margaret of the Golden Ring's copy of the Heinrich of Nördlingen translation (the Einsiedeln manuscript) in a monastery library in 1861. After this discovery, Mechthild's text is used in efforts to define a tradition of literature and of philosophy that has its roots in the vernacular writings of medieval Dominicans. Any problem that Mechthild's female authorship might raise for Greith is outweighed by the evidence the manuscript seems to provide for Dominican importance in a history of German literature (Greith was a Dominican priest and initially assumed that Mechthild was a Dominican nun). However, later nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century histories of mysticism reveal the reappearance of female authorship as a point of conceptual difficulty. Indeed, as we shall see, gender becomes linked with the distinction between rational and irrational modes of discourse, a link framed in Romantic (and nationalist) aesthetics. Mechthild's text is subsequently transmitted in association with other women's texts in traditions for which concepts of immediacy and femininity become synonymous. The historians discussed devalue the women's texts because they presumably do not display the thoughtful, rational—read active—authorship displayed by the men. Once again, authorship can only be attributed to the women insofar as their agency (rational, active authorship) is downplayed. This chapter concludes by exposing this link as it resurfaces in modern anthologies of both medieval German literature and medieval women writers.

The traditions constructed in these varying moments of reception are to be understood, as John Guillory suggests, as a series of historical fictions—that is, as imagined totalities that retroactively unify an unspecified number of cultural productions. As Guillory argues, the larger and more disparate the group of works to be unified, the more urgent and totalizing the concept of tradition is likely to be.⁵ Tracing the changing "cultural capital" of Mechthild's book into the modern period, then, reveals an intensification of the problem of female authorship. Further, attending to the relation of Mechthild's work to others exposes the particular, sometimes competing ideological values and aims embedded in tradition-forming gestures. As will become clear, gender is often a significant factor in the reception. More importantly, however, continuing to focus on the ways that gender functions

in the transmission points out the instability of the concepts and categories around which traditions and canons tend to be formed; these include concepts of what is literary, what is holy, what is philosophical, and what contributes to an idea of national identity. The story of Mechthild's post-medieval reception does not follow the simple trajectory of oblivion to full canonicity; rather, it forces us to qualify what tradition and canonicity mean in different historical moments.

The Latin Legacy

Mechthild's reception after 1500 begins with the translation of the Latin *Lux divinitatis* back into Middle High German in 1517. This manuscript, also known as the Wolhusener manuscript (Rw) after the seminary in Wolhusen where it was found in 1926, collects Mechthild's writings together with those of an earlier mystic, Elisabeth of Schönau.⁶ In contrast to the manuscripts of the observance tradition that compile large numbers of anonymous excerpts from devotional writings, this codex collects two substantial books of revelations attributed to and identified with two named holy women visionaries. Although the initial pages of the manuscript containing the beginning of the Elisabeth section have been lost, her name appears at the end of each of the books included in the collection—the *Liber visionum* (Book of Visions); the *Liber viarum dei* (Book of the Ways of God), *Liber revelationum de sacro exercitu virginum Coloniensium* (which tells the legend of St. Ursula and the 11,000 virgins), *Epistulae* (letters) and a sixth book, about Elisabeth's death.⁷ The first two pages of the Mechthild section, containing the title and the beginning of the table of contents, have also been lost, but Mechthild and the title are also named on folio 6^b, where the text begins: “das buch so genant ist das liecht der gotheit welches von christo ist geoffenbart worden der heiligen frawen Mechtildi von Helpede” (the book is called the light of God which was revealed by Christ to the holy woman Mechthild of Helfta).⁸ If the observance manuscripts construct a tradition for which the categories of gender and named authorship do not matter, the Rw codex suggests a tradition in which they do.

In making this collecting decision, the Rw scribe might be taking a cue from the manuscript sources. Although the exact sources of Rw are unknown, the extant Latin manuscripts can give us some general indicators of compiling patterns in Latin devotional manuscripts. As we have seen, the Latin translators placed Mechthild in a category of holy women prophets in order to overcome the problem of female authorship that male learned readers might have had with the *Lux divinitatis*.⁹ Connecting Mechthild's prophetic experience with that of women from the Old Testament would have reminded contemporary readers that the prophetic authorship of an “inferior” female has biblical precedent. This strategy then took a slightly different form in the

manuscripts as transmitted (Rb and Ra). The earlier of the two Latin manuscripts (Rb, mid-fourteenth century) binds five distinct booklets in one codex. While the prologue to the *Lux divinitatis* invokes the stories of Deborah and Huldah from the Bible, the booklet in Rb containing the *Lux divinitatis* also includes an abridged version of Thomas of Cantimpré's life of Christina Mirabilis (d. 1224).¹⁰ The later manuscript (Ra, early fifteenth century), though related to Rb, transmits Mechthild's Latin book in a reshuffled order and not in its entirety. The Mechthild section of Ra includes the same abridged life of Christina that appears in Rb; both Mechthild and Christina are named in the later manuscript.¹¹ Ra also includes within the Mechthild section twenty-three chapters from the life and revelations of the Viennese beguine, Agnes Blannbekin (d. 1315), although it appears that the scribe mistook these writings for a variant copy of Mechthild's book.¹² For the compilers of Rb and Ra, then, it was important to acknowledge not only ancient or biblical precedent for prophetically gifted women but also the existence of contemporary women whose experiences with the divine had been recorded for the edification of others.

Although Elisabeth of Schönau was not Mechthild's exact contemporary, their revelations clearly struck the Rw scribe as belonging together. We can safely assume the following reasons for this impression: Both sets of writings record autobiographical/hagiographical accounts of visionary experience and commentary; both were in Latin; both were, according to the prologues of each, compiled (and, in Elisabeth's case, written down) by someone else; and as Elke Senne has noted, both comprised six "books."¹³ Further, Mechthild's identification as "of Helfta" indicates that the scribe understood Mechthild, like Elisabeth, to have been a nun living in a cloistered setting. The two women together thus construct a tradition of female monastic authors.

The Rw scribe's idea for this grouping may also have come from another kind of source. With the advent of print, collections of writings by named visionary writers were becoming popular subjects for printed books. Wilhelm Oehl comments that the first books of Elisabeth's *Liber visionum* and of the *Liber viarum dei* were widely read in the Middle Ages and were gathered together in a print anthology as early as 1513 in Paris by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (Jacobus Faber Stapulensis, d. 1536, hereafter referred to as Lefèvre).¹⁴ The book Oehl refers to here is an anthology called the *Liber trium virorum & trium spiritualium virginum* (Book of Three Men and Three Women of the Spirit). It includes one book of the writings of Hermas (first or second century author of "The Shepherd," one of Hildegard of Bingen's key sources), one book by an Augustinian monk called "Vgetinus" (the anonymous *Visio Wettini*, a vision of the otherworld), two books by a Dominican Brother Robert (of Uzès, an apocalyptic prophet read in the same circles as Hermas), three books from Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*, six books from the works of Elisabeth of Schönau, and five books of Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Liber specialis gratiae*. The works of three medieval visionary

nuns are thus collected together in a group (along with the work of three male visionaries) for edification and inspiration of sixteenth-century cloistered or clerical readers.¹⁵ Although the three male-authored texts come first in the manuscript, the texts by Hildegard, Elisabeth, and Mechthild of Hackeborn dominate the book, covering 163 out of 190 folios.¹⁶ That this grouping of women's visionary texts might have some connection (at least conceptually) to the construction of a codex like Rw is likely, for Lefèvre's book was indeed the source for the Elisabeth section of Rw. The six books of the Elisabeth section of the *Liber trium* include the same selections from Elisabeth's works and in the same order as those included in the Rw translation: two chapters from the visions, one chapter from the *Liber viarum dei*, a chapter on the 11,000 virgins, a chapter of the letters, and her brother Eckbert's account of her death in the final chapter.¹⁷

The publication of Lefèvre's book (1513) and the production of Rw only four years later (1517) point to the emergence in the early sixteenth century of a Latin tradition defined more explicitly around the authorship of holy women. Further support for this contention can be found in a fifteenth-century library catalogue entry for a compilation manuscript (no longer extant) containing twenty-seven chapters from the *Lux divinitatis* and the revelations of Elisabeth of Trier (Schönaue) in succession, along with a number of other religious booklets.¹⁸ This library catalogue (for a Carthusian library in Erfurt, last quarter of the fifteenth century) also lists the revelations of Mechthild of Hackeborn, a complete copy of the *Lux divinitatis*, several books containing the revelations of St. Birgitta, the revelations and life of St. Catherine of Siena, and another compilation of "books by devout women" including excerpts from the writings of Birgitta, one or both Mechthilds, St. Margaret, Catherine of Siena, Hildegard, and the blessed "Trute" (probably Gertrud the Great of Helfta).¹⁹ The importance of this tradition was felt as far off as Spain in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. A Spanish Carmelite and companion to Teresa of Avila cites the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg and Elisabeth as justification for the publication of Teresa's writings.²⁰

The (imagined) traditions implied by these manuscripts and books must also be understood in terms of their ideological aims. Rw is a book about two visionary nuns that was undoubtedly meant for devotional instruction in a cloistered setting.²¹ The compilation in Lefèvre's devotional book creates a tradition of visionary writing (predominantly by or about women) addressed to the abbess of a convent dedicated to St. Hildegard and was no doubt meant as inspiration for the nuns there. The next moment of reception takes us out of the religious context, however. A seventeenth-century pamphlet presents a list of learned women of the present and past. Frawenlob—the named author of the pamphlet—includes Mechthild in his list not because of her talents as a poet, but rather because of her "prophetic spirit."²² This pamphlet was produced as a contribution to the *Querelle des femmes*, a pan-European debate about the misogynistic views of women that emerged in the late Middle Ages

in France, but only emerged in Germany after the Reformation.²³ This German pamphlet groups holy women writers together with ancient and contemporary female poets and historical figures to promote the education of women. Published in 1631, it presents an alphabetical and annotated list of “the most prominent learned, intelligent, and artistic female persons that have lived in the world until our time.”²⁴ The author, Johann Frawenlob, describes “Saint Mechthild” as “a holy virgin, [who] was not only exquisitely learned, but also was gifted with a prophetic spirit.”²⁵ “Johann Frawenlob,” listed as *General Notarius* of *Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft der Gelehrten Weiber* (The Praiseworthy Society of Learned Women) on the title page, is most likely a pseudonym, either referring to an association of educated women or simply to the activity of praising women, which the author undertakes.²⁶ As the sponsoring society and the name of the author suggest, the pamphlet is explicitly intended to honor “the female sex” as well as to proclaim women equal if not superior to men in intellectual ability. Not only has God, writes Frawenlob, graced women with understanding, wisdom, and heroic dispositions both in the Bible and in history but also “God has rendered unto such women many a beautiful and able *Genius* and made them qualified to study, so that they became learned and famous people.”²⁷ Furthermore, the examples offered in this collection clearly show first, that women’s genius proves often more subtle than that granted men and, second, that “when such women are diligently instructed in their youth and held to their studies, many a female becomes as learned as many a man would [under similar conditions].”²⁸

This pamphlet is the first printed document in which Mechthild of Magdeburg figures as part of a countertradition: her name included along with others works to correct or point out a faulty institutional ideology, in this case misogynistic attitudes about women’s ability to learn. The work is not quite as progressive as it seems, however, as becomes evident when Frawenlob declares that Christian, virtuous parents, upon reading about these learned women, will be inspired

ihre Kinderzucht mit ihren Töchtern besser anzustellen / und solche mit grösserem Eyffer unnd Ernst hinfort (als leider bißher geschehn) zuüben / so werden nicht stoltze / hoffertige Schminckflecke / sondern Gottselige / verständige / geschickte Leute auß ihnen werden / die Gott recht dienen / den Eltern gehorchen / ihre künftige Ehe-Männer ehren / unnd der Haußhaltung mit Nutz wol fürstehen können.²⁹

to undertake better the upbringing of their daughters, to encourage their progress with greater zeal and seriousness (than has happened until now), so that they will become not proud, arrogant beauty queens but rather blessed, intelligent, clever people, who serve God properly, obey their parents, honor their future husbands, and can well maintain the household to good use.

Frawenlob explicitly establishes a tradition of famous, accomplished, ingenious women, so that more women will be educated seriously, though not outside the bounds of home and church, a social reform that in his view will lead to a morally superior and properly ordered society. Expressly intended to honor women, this list points to the inequalities women generally face in

terms of education and argues for a more equal distribution of scholarly resources, and yet it also soundly relegates women back into the home under the authority of their fathers and husbands.

In each instance of this disjointed Latin transmission, then, Mechthild is associated with other authors or visionaries in a move to establish an (imagined) unifying tradition. Focusing on gender allows us to see how these traditions differ. In the case of the Latin translation (as discussed in Chapter 3), the tradition invoked balances between reinforcing and breaking with conventional conceptions of the feminine. While the notion of female authorship or agency is implicitly acknowledged (the Dominicans are, after all, publishing a female-authored text), the editors remind their male readership that women prophets are traditionally understood not as agents or creators of text, but rather as the instruments and vessels of God. To be a prophet does not mean unequivocally to lack agency, however; rather, linking the female prophet's claim on authority to a softening of female authorial responsibility signals that this responsibility or agency presents a conceptual or ideological problem. The authority of a female prophet thus rests on the extent to which people believe God, and not her, to be the author or origin of what she says or writes. Once Mechthild is placed in a tradition of ancient female prophets, the readers can overlook what they might perceive as the aberration of the female author, for the tradition invoked here effaces Mechthild's authorship. This interpretive move on the part of the editors produces something of a paradox. Mechthild's identification as a prophet is legitimized by virtue of her sex—that is by virtue of the fact that her sexual difference from male writers unites her with other women who have been messengers of God. Yet, as a woman, the only role granted her in the production of the text is that of medium, for agency is not a conventional feminine attribute. Mechthild's inclusion or presence as a named author in the tradition imagined, that of Dominican writings generally, is thus contingent upon her invisibility—her lack of authorial agency, her veiled or negated subject position—within it. The tradition here is imagined, first, to justify a woman's place in a male tradition and, second, to subordinate that place at the same time.

This impulse becomes more complicated in the transmission of the Latin translation in compilation manuscripts (Rb and Ra). As I have already suggested, the collocation of Mechthild's writings with Christina Mirabilis's *vita* in these manuscripts suggests another way of imagining the tradition to which Mechthild belongs: instead of a set of *ancient* female prophets as models, these compilers develop and promote a tradition of *contemporary* women visionaries. Alternatively, the compilers may have thought the somewhat counterintuitive notion of a female author for male readers could be mitigated by collecting Mechthild's text together with the male-authored life of Christina. Binding Mechthild and Elisabeth's Latin works together in a German translation (Rw) can also be seen to promote an idea of a women's

visionary or mystical tradition but for different reasons—namely, to benefit the contemplative lives of other religious women. As with the transmission of the Einsiedeln manuscript, female authorship need not be effaced when intended for enclosed female audiences. Finally, although the 1513 printed anthology does not collect Mechthild of Magdeburg's visions, it is also addressed to cloistered nuns for whom the three women visionaries would offer inspiration. The inclusion of the short entries by male visionaries likely functions to legitimize the women authors further.

While the Latin manuscripts, the German *Rw*, and the Lefèvre anthology were made for the purposes of religious education, the pamphlet by Johann Frawenlob has different aims. In this case, the breadth of the tradition proposed (organized by two principles, sexual difference and intellectual prowess) is supposed to modify a preconception about gender that assumes that all women have always had an inferior intellect and therefore cannot be given a "serious" education, even as it promotes another preconception limiting women to a domestic realm in which their genius is subordinated to the rule of husbands and fathers. Mechthild is listed, then, precisely as a great intellect, one with highly admirable prophetic powers as well, and who who will inspire parents to create better (read: sensibly obedient, socially useful) daughters and wives. The tradition imagined serves the social purpose of controlling female agency by limiting educated women to subordinated roles.

The early modern Latin transmission thus continues the pattern begun in the Latin prologue to the *Lux divinitatis*. When named female authorship is part of the transmission, it must either be aimed at a private, female-defined sphere (*Rw*, *Liber trium*) or in some way subordinated to male authority (Frawenlob's pamphlet). Because, as this evidence suggests, female agency is limited either to the home or the convent, it is perhaps not surprising that Sister Mechthild's reputation as a mystic prophet and learned woman does indeed fade from the cultural consciousness.

There are additional factors in play here, however. While the Elisabeth selections in the *Liber trium* establish a connection between the printed anthology and *Rw*, the Mechthild of Hackeborn selections here point to a phenomenon that also contributed to the receding of Mechthild of Magdeburg's text from this medieval and now early modern Latin transmission. The reader may have noticed that while *Rw* collects Mechthild "of Helfta's" *Lux divinitatis*, the *Liber trium* collects the *Liber specialis gratiae*, the revelations of the *other* Mechthild in Helfta. Because both women lived and died in the convent of Helfta (though Mechthild of Magdeburg only lived there during the last decade of her life) and because Mechthild of Hackeborn was venerated as a saint,³⁰ in the years following their deaths (1282 and 1298, respectively) they often became conflated into one person, *Sankt Mechtildis* or *die heilige jungfraw Mechtildis*. Mechthild of Hackeborn also came from a family of nobles (the counts of Mansfeld) who had landholdings in northern Thuringia and the Harz, which may account for the

more widespread authority of her name.³¹ Further, her book was much more widely circulated than the *Lux divinitatis* in the late Middle Ages. Scholars surmise that the *Liber specialis gratiae*, a book famous for its accounts of Mechthild of Hackeborn's mystical experiences and visions, was recorded in Latin by Gertrud the Great and several other nuns from the convent.³² A total of 103 Latin manuscripts of the *Liber specialis gratiae* are extant, a significant number compared to the three manuscripts of Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Lux divinitatis* (Rb, Ra, Rw). Only nine of the 103 transmit the text in its entirety. An abridged version (five books) was very popular (thirty-six of the 103 manuscripts), bits of which were included in florilegia (seventeen manuscripts). There are twenty-six prayer books and books of contemplation that transmit short excerpts from the *Liber specialis gratiae* and fifteen manuscripts of the Latin version in England.³³ The *Liber specialis gratiae* also enjoyed wide circulation in vernacular translation: there are forty-seven manuscripts transmitting it in Middle High German, thirty-seven of which transmit excerpts; 144 Middle Dutch manuscripts, 114 of which transmit excerpts; and there are medieval and early modern translations into Middle English (two fifteenth-century manuscripts), Middle Swedish (two fifteenth-century manuscripts), Old Italian (1590 imprint), and Old French (1623 imprint).³⁴ The popularity of her revelations, her noble status, and her reputation as a saint, I would argue, accounts for the more frequent appearance of Mechthild of Hackeborn's work in the early print books like Lefèvre's.³⁵ If only one Mechthild were to be remembered, it was more likely to be Mechthild of Hackeborn.³⁶

This tendency to confuse and conflate accounts of holy women was also common in the publications relating to the *Querelle des femmes*. While Frawenlob lists Mechthild of Magdeburg, Elisabeth of Schönaue, and Hildegard of Bingen as learned abbesses and authors in his pamphlet celebrating learned women, he fails to include the other Helfta women. In pamphlets on learned women from 1686 and 1701, however, Johannes Pasch and Johannes Planer list Hildegard (as a virgin from Mainz, not as an abbess), Elisabeth (as a literary successor of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim), and the two Helfta nuns (Gertrud the Great and Mechthild of Hackeborn).³⁷ It is important to mention here that there were also two Gertruds at Helfta when the two Mechthilds were there. Mechthild of Hackeborn had an elder sister, Gertrud, who became the abbess of Helfta in 1251 and died in 1291.³⁸ The younger, unrelated Gertrud, now known as Gertrud the Great (1256–1301), is commonly thought to be responsible for assembling and writing down Mechthild of Hackeborn's revelations as well as a book of her own (in both cases with the help of some of the other nuns).³⁹ In the Pasch and Planer pamphlets, the younger Gertrud is listed anonymously as "a virgin and nun in the convent of Helfta whose name is unknown."⁴⁰ Her book is listed correctly, though, as the *Botschaft oder Legation göttlicher Güte* (*Legatus divinae pietatis*—the Messenger or Herald of Divine Love).⁴¹ Pasch and Planer go on

to list Mechthild of Hackeborn as the author of a “Golden Prayerbook.”⁴² In a different pamphlet from 1688, however, Mechthild of Hackeborn, nun of Helfta, of the County of Mansfeld, is the author of the *Legatus* and is also thought to be a Cistercian nun living near Switzerland (1688).⁴³ In three works about learned women by Christian Franz Paullini (1695, 1700, and 1705), Hildegard of Bingen has been split into two Hildegards, the abbess who wrote a legendary and a physic and (in two of the lists) a virgin from Mainz who authored a book of remedies for various illnesses. Paullini also names a Gertrud, but this time she is not only the author of the *finfff Büchern* assembled and printed by “Joann Landsberg” (the *Legatus* was printed by Johannes Landsberg in 1505), but also she is identified as the benedictine abbess and “gebohrne Gräfin von Hackeborn.”⁴⁴ Paullini also mentions the anonymous nun of Helfta who wrote the *Buch der Bottschaft* (*Legatus*) but claims that “es sey keine andere gewesen / als Mechthild von Hackeborn” (it was no other than Mechthild of Hackeborn).⁴⁵ Paullini thus folds the younger Gertrud into the older Abbess and Countess Gertrud. Moreover, he attributes Gertrud the Great’s book (*Legatus*) to both Mechthild of Hackeborn (who did not even author her own book of revelations) *and* to Gertrud the abbess who never wrote anything at all.

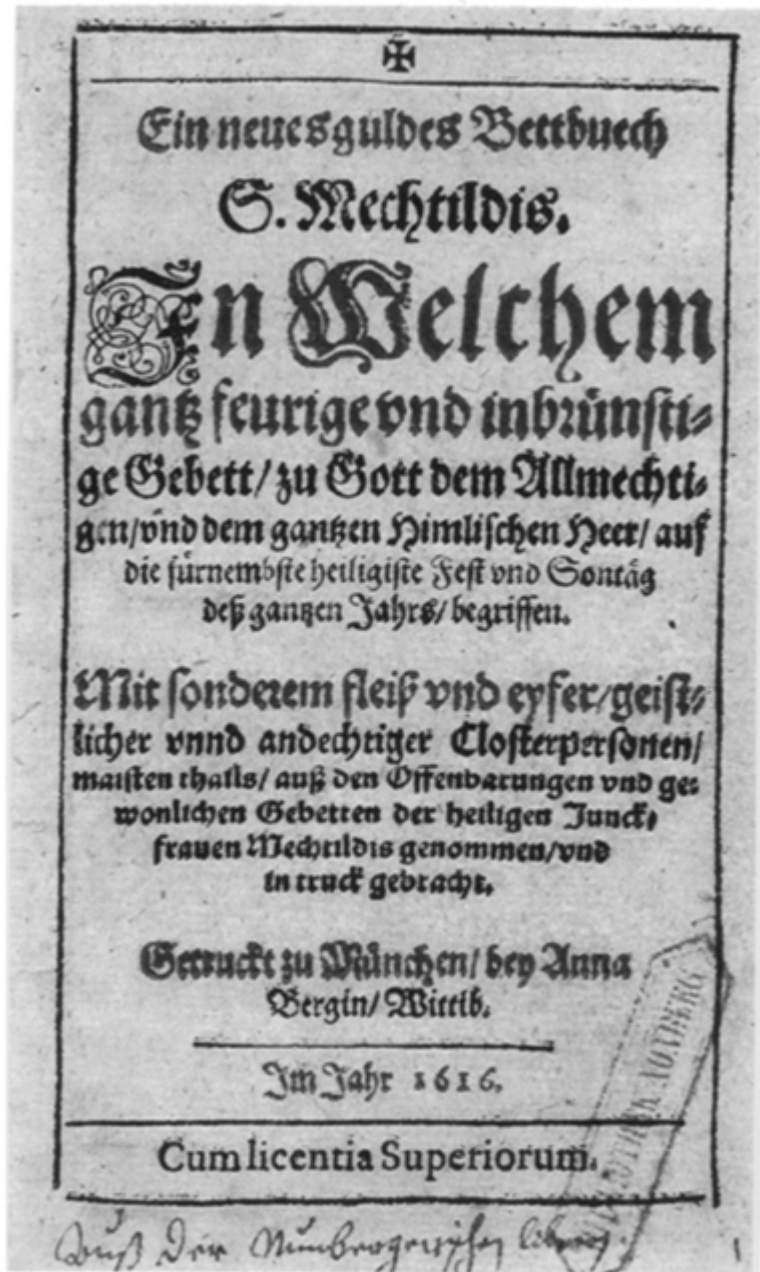


Figure 5. Title page from the work *Ein neues guldnes Bettbuech S. Mechtildis* by Mechthild of Hackeborn (Jantz PrB#143), Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

The “Golden Prayerbook” attributed by Pasch and Planer to Mechthild of Hackeborn is quite possibly related to Gertrud the Great’s book, *Spiritual Exercises*, a collection of prayers and hymns related to the liturgy. Paullini attributes this prayer book to Gertrud the abbess and mentions that it was

printed by Wilhelm Friess of Cologne in 1670.⁴⁶ This book was printed widely in the seventeenth century.⁴⁷ Two other prayer books owned by the Duke University library appear to be related to this tradition and further exemplify the confusion of names and works among the Helfta nuns. An imprint from 1616 (Figure 5) calls the book:

Ein neues guides Bettbuech S. Mechtildis. In Welchem gantz feurige vnd inbrünstige Gebett / zu Gott dem Allmechtigen / vnd dem gantzen himlischen heer auf die fürnembste heiligste Fest vnd Sontäg deß gantzen Jahres / begriffen. Mit sonderem fleiß vnd eyfer / geistlicher vnnd andechtiger Closterpersonen / maisten thails / auß den Offenbarungen vnd gewonlichen Gebetten der heiligen Junck-frauen Mechtildis genommen / vnd in truck gebracht.⁴⁸

A new golden prayerbook of Saint Mechthild. In which quite fiery and burning prayers to God Almighty and to the entire heavenly host on the most prominent holy feasts and Sundays of the whole year are conceived. With special toil and effort of the spiritual and contemplative monastics, for the most part taken out of the Revelations and habitual prayers of the holy virgin Mechthild and brought into print.

A book from 1690 with similar contents (a long succession of prayers), but which differs in arrangement, collects several other unidentified booklets and is attributed this time to “Saints Gertrud and Mechthild”: “Geistlicher Baum: Oder Blumen-Garten / Allwo die Liebende in dem Geliebten / vnnd die Seele in dem Seeligmacher / sich zum liebseeligsten zuerfrewen hat. Auch S. Gertrudi vnd Mechtildis Gebettbuech. Fuer das hoch-adelige Frawen-Zimmer” (Spiritual Tree: or Flower Garden, where she who loves can rejoice to her utmost in the Beloved, and the soul in the source of her bliss. Also the Prayerbook of Saints Gertrud and Mechthild. For the high noble female sex).⁴⁹ As this evidence suggests, the publishing of devotional anthologies and pamphlets about learned women was characterized by confusion about these women’s identities and about which writings they authored.

Finally, this phenomenon was not exclusive to the writings and identities of religious women. In a brief survey of the early modern religious books in the Stanford University Library Special Collections, for example, I came across two books claiming to transmit the works of Johannes Tauler, but which were later determined to collect only some of his texts among those of contemporaries like Rulman Merswin (1307–1382).⁵⁰ Clearly this material requires much more study, but my brief examination of the situation surrounding the early modern reception and transmission of visionary and devotional writings suggests that a name with authority, especially if based in institutional (Tauler) or cultural (Mechthild, a daughter of the counts of Mansfeld) hierarchies can overcome the name that does not. In this way, the prophetically gifted *S. Mechtildis, Eine heilige Jungfraw* of the *Frawenlob* pamphlet becomes obscured by the more noble sister Mechthild of Hackeborn, the “countess,” whose tidings of divine love, uttered quietly from her sickbed at the end of her life, were so consoling that she was and still is venerated as a saint without ever having been officially canonized.⁵¹

As we have seen, the gradual disappearance of Mechthild of Magdeburg and her *Lux divinitatis* occurs for a number of reasons, but not because

Mechthild was excluded from a tradition because of her gender. Rather, Mechthild's authorship presents a problem for the initial publishers of the Latin version of her book that is resolved through the imagining of different legitimizing female traditions (biblical female prophets, contemporary women visionaries, male-authored accounts of extraordinary women). The Latin translators and compilers want to spread Mechthild's words, but because of bans on women teaching and preconceptions about women's ability to have authority, they must downplay her active role as author to do so. Combatting preconceptions about female intellectuals and authors for different reasons was Johann Frawenlob. His strategy, like many others participating in the *Querelle* debates, was to form a countertradition that proved the preconceptions wrong. However, Mechthild's inclusion on Frawenlob's list was not enough to ensure her place even in this female-defined countertradition. For her association with the other "holy virgins" of Helfta meant that her identity and the reputation of her revelations would merge with those of Mechthild of Hackeborn who was more memorable for other reasons—she was from a prominent noble family and she was regarded as a saint. Despite being included in Latin traditions that acknowledged her by name, Mechthild of Magdeburg's early modern fate is to fade into the background of religious devotions and the *Lux divinitatis* falls out of circulation.

Mechthild's Rediscovery

When Carl Greith rediscovered Mechthild's book in 1861, he found not the Latin translation made by the Dominicans to spread Mechthild's and God's words to a wider audience but the Middle High German translation so warmly praised by Heinrich of Nördlingen when he sent it to Margaret Ebner in 1345. An examination of this branch of the transmission reveals the imagining of traditions along very different lines. Moreover, the problem of female authorship intensifies and takes on the contours with which we are more familiar today.

As Frank Tobin notes in his review of Mechthild criticism, Carl Greith—author of one of the first histories of German mysticism, *Die deutsche Mystik im Prediger-Orden*—shared the romantic interest in the medieval flowering of vernacular literature in German.⁵² This interest was grounded in a desire to form a tradition of German vernacular literature that would establish German as a literary and cultural language and hence to lend credibility to the idea of a German nation or national identity.⁵³ Greith, a Dominican priest, was interested not only in establishing a German literary tradition but also in establishing its foundation or origin in medieval Dominican writings. Greith notes the mendicant orders' innovations to ministry by preaching in the vernacular. He further explains that these public sermons "served the German language, whose beauty and rich content was in this way increasingly

acknowledged” (49–50). According to Greith, the Dominicans soon surpassed the Franciscans in pursuing with especial vigor the mystical life in monasteries and cloisters and at the same time, brought “German poetry and prose to new flowering” (53). If Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) later uses and enriches the vernacular in expressing his profound speculations and daring thoughts, writes Greith, then Mechthild represents an earlier and equally remarkable attempt. Further, Greith finds the results in Mechthild’s case to be a veritable monument of German literature, and one of the most beautiful at that (207).

As a Catholic priest working like other Romantics to counter the Enlightenment privileging of reason and rationality, it was also important to Greith that the tradition he was tracing was rich not only in reason but also in revelations—that is, in the beauty that comes from divine inspiration. Consequently, he saw Eckhart’s prose as representative of the former; Eckhart was responsible for bringing the *höchsten Probleme des philosophischen Denkens* (the most sophisticated problems of philosophical thought) into the realm of mystical contemplation. As such, he became the *Stammhalter* (legacy) for the German mystics whose influence would dominate in the first half of the fourteenth century (60). Mechthild’s book, in turn, was a treasure for the knowledge of German mysticism, and its legacy was the *Bereicherung der deutschen Poesie und Prosa* (enrichment of German poetry and prose) (58). Greith’s implicit goal, then, was, first, to posit the German language as a great philosophical *and* literary language and, second, to posit the beginnings of this language in a tradition of Dominican writings. As these examples suggest, we encounter a more complex framework of traditions in Greith’s history, which all seem to be in flux as he attempts to negotiate between the categories of reason and understanding, rationality and spirituality, philosophy and poetry.

Where gender was a problem for the Latin translators, and central for Frawenlob, it is less of an issue for Greith. He does not make explicit reference to the sex of the authors he considers, nor does he evaluate them along gender lines. If he sings the praises of Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse, it is because they are linked through their training (Tauler and Seuse were students of Eckhart) and, more importantly, because they were Dominicans who wrote and preached in German. In Greith’s view, Mechthild is just as much a monument to the greatness of the German language as Eckhart, as are the convent chronicles or *Sisterbooks*, which postdate both of them, excerpts of which Greith also includes in his book. If there is a gender opposition established by holding Eckhart up as instrumental for the beginnings of philosophical discourse in German and Mechthild as the beginnings of spiritually inspired and literary prose, Greith seems to want to resist it: in promoting her text as a work of great lyrical quality, he remarks that some of the imagery is *etwas frei* (somewhat unrestrained or unconventional)—a reference to the more ecstatic and erotic sections of the book (57). In so doing,

he seems to anticipate the judgment of his contemporaries that this quality is feminine and therefore less monumental, for he goes on to explain that men write like this, too: “the poets of spiritual love found their source in large part in the Song of Songs of the Old Testament, on which not only the early mystics based their teachings on the mystical life, but also the later ones, namely St. Bernard [of Clairvaux] and the two Victorines [Hugh and Richard]” (57–58). Greith, like the medieval Dominican editors, shows an awareness that gender might be an obstacle to the acceptance of Mechthild’s book as a monument in the tradition he constructs.

Unlike the Dominican editors, however, he invokes a male tradition to overcome this obstacle. It is an inclusive move, I think, rather than an effacing one, but one that has contradictory consequences, for much of the reception that follows seems to oscillate between varying sides of dualistic evaluations in which gender plays an increasingly significant role. If, in claiming Mechthild for a Dominican tradition, the Latin translators effaced her role as author and emphasized the prophetic and instructional content of her book, Greith’s placement of Mechthild in a Dominican tradition emphasizes the poetry and literary quality of her text—that is, its status as literature as defined in the nineteenth century. In the introduction to the 1869 edition of the text, the Einsiedeln librarian, Gall Morel, also claims to privilege the literary aspects of the text. However, in his view, what he calls *den epischen Gehalt* (epic content) should be held in higher regard by literary history than the lyrical *Minnesang* praised by Greith.⁵⁴ In explaining his meaning, Morel cites a cosmic vision of the mysteries of the incarnation, heaven, and hell (V, 23) that for him recalls the imagery of Homer and Virgil.⁵⁵ Perhaps in holding epic in higher esteem than lyric, Morel harks back to the traditional Aristotelian hierarchy between the two. Regardless of the motivation for his preference, however, it is clear that he, like Greith wishes to establish a position for Mechthild’s text in a distinctively literary tradition and, in this instance, one that not only attracts the attention of Prussian scholars of the German language but also goes beyond the boundaries of German literature (xxi).

Taking up another thread from Greith’s text, Wilhelm Preger’s three volume history of German mysticism, published between 1874 and 1893, was also concerned with the relationship between German mysticism and the origins of German philosophy. Preger was also writing from a romantic and anti-Enlightenment perspective but as a Protestant. He finds evidence in mysticism not only of a specifically Germanic predilection for profundity, but also, as a Lutheran, he sees mysticism as one of the most important preconditions of the Reformation.⁵⁶ In Preger’s study we also see the first *explicit* association of gender with evaluation. Addressing the apparent significant role of women in pressing for the reform of the early church, Preger notes that religious communities of women in the Rhineland and southern Germany were seven times more abundant than in northern Germany

because:

In Oberdeutschland und am Rheine ist das Gemüth vorwaltend, das Seelenleben lebendiger, der ideale Aufschwung leichter als in Niederdeutschland, wo die bedächtige Ueberlegung mehr Einhalt thut. Unter beiden Geschlechtern ist es aber wiederum das Weibliche, bei welchem das Gemüthsleben überwiegt.⁵⁷

In Upper Germany and on the Rhine the emotional life predominates, the life of the soul is more intense, the flight of the mind easier than in Lower Germany, where thoughtful deliberation interferes. Among both races, however, it is the feminine where the emotional life predominates.

Preger defines *Gemüth* as *die Sinn für die unmittelbare Empfindung und Bewahrung des Idealen* (a sense for the immediate feeling and preservation of ideas) and finds it almost exclusively in the character of the German folk: *Er zeigt sich bei keiner reiner, tiefer und stärker als bei der germanischen* (Among no others than the Germans does it show itself to be purer, deeper or stronger).⁵⁸ Interestingly, while the high level of female involvement in this emotional life posits the emotional, as well as the essentially German, as feminine, Preger nevertheless gives Meister Eckhart center stage in his book as the exemplar of German speculative mysticism. Further, while he notes that elements of Eckhart's language seem to echo what already appeared in Mechthild's, rather than categorize her as part of a new tradition out of which Eckhart emerges and to which he responds, he argues that these elements of speculative mysticism had been previously frozen into the German language itself.⁵⁹

As Frank Tobin has noted, Preger's Catholic contemporary, Heinrich Seuse Denifle criticized Preger aggressively for having made generalizations about mystical writings without sufficient background knowledge of medieval theology, specifically the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century development of scholasticism. This debate took place at a time when German-speaking Catholics in Bismarck's Reich were thought of as political enemies of Germany and as a result were organizing militant opposition. Catholic intellectuals were doing their part by rehabilitating the great Catholic medieval philosophers and theologians like Aquinas. Denifle's blistering critique of Preger's work emerges out of this context.⁶⁰ Because of the particular harshness of this critique, as justified as it may have been, interest in Mechthild and medieval mysticism outside of theological disciplines waned. In *Germanistik*, studies of the mystics were by and large confined to the subfield of *Altgermanistik* and to questions of philology and biography. Subsequent general studies of the mystics in theology focused primarily on speculative or rational mysticism, holding it up as the definition of mysticism proper and privileging it over a less valued emotional, or spontaneous and contemplative form.⁶¹

In this transmission, Mechthild's text has consistently been acknowledged, though more often than not (as with Preger), as an unknowing and inferior precursor of the great Masters.⁶² It is in this context that the category of *Frauenmystik* emerged. Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert's 1943 study of mysticism (revised in 1946 and 1969), for example, gives *Frauenmystik* a

separate chapter and a separate development. According to Wentzlaff-Eggebert, the emotional and lyrical heights achieved by Mechthild in the thirteenth century are less common in the women mystics of the fourteenth century, against whose tendency toward overly ascetic practices and doctrinal error the three great masters who follow them (Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse) will preach.⁶³ The chapter focusing on the three greats bears the title, *Die Vertiefung des unio-Erlebnisses in der Mystik der Meister* (The Deepening of the *unio* Experience in the Mysticism of the Masters), this “*unio* experience” having been defined in the preceding chapters by example of the women mystics and providing the material that the men will be shown to expand (86). However, in a somewhat startling inconsistency, the speculative mysticism of the men is said not only to expand *Frauenmystik* but also to be its very foundation—that is to precede it. As the abstract to the chapter announces: “Speculative mysticism [is] the necessary expansion and *foundation* (*Unterbauung*) of women’s mysticism.”⁶⁴ This contradiction is in my view an example of a perhaps unconscious reluctance on the part of Wentzlaff-Eggebert to grant a prominent historical place and role to women mystics in his story of the development of mysticism generally. The distinction made between speculative mysticism and *Frauenmystik* is clearly gendered and just as clearly hierarchical. Speculative mysticism of the great male masters is accorded a privileged status: “Das Feuer der Spekulation reinigt die Bewegung von den Schäden des aufbrechenden freien Geistes in den Klöstern,” writes Wentzlaff-Eggebert, “Dabei wird die Mystik wieder zum Ausdruck einer reinen Frömmigkeit . . .” (88; The fire of speculation rids the movement of the damages imparted by the explosion of the free spirit in the convents. In this way mysticism becomes once again an expression of pure piety . . .). In all fairness, we must acknowledge that Wentzlaff-Eggebert saw the origin of this “pure piety” in the works of Hildegard of Bingen and Mechthild of Magdeburg, which was then corrupted by overenthusiastic women religious in the fourteenth century.⁶⁵ The opposition he sets up between the *heilsam* (healing) effect of speculative mysticism and the *ekstatische Visionsmystik* or *Gefühlsmystik* (ecstatic visionary mysticism or emotional mysticism) has lasting consequences. Indeed, the legacy of this categorization has been the consistent distinction in histories and encyclopedias between the speculative or philosophical thought of male mysticism and the emotional experience of female mystics, a distinction that, as Gabriele Strauch has convincingly argued, reinforces the identification of the masculine with mediated and rational knowledge and the feminine with immediate and irrational experience.⁶⁶

The late and postmedieval reception of Mechthild’s text reveals to us a variety of traditions being imagined and constructed, which in turn provide insight into the aims and, hence, ideologies implied by these traditions. In the Latin translation, the purpose is to edify good Dominicans with the writings of a contemporary female prophet; the German translations of Elisabeth of

Schönauf and Mechthild “of Helfta’s” Latin writings in *Rw* construct a tradition of visionary women writers for reading at table in a convent. Lefèvre’s anthology hopes to inspire nuns by laying out a tradition of visionary writing dominated by the great visionary nun to whom their house is dedicated (Hildegard). With Frawenlob’s pamphlet, the purpose is to promote education for women so that they might become more “sensible” wives and daughters. With the return of the German transmission to the scene, however, Mechthild’s text serves the purpose of defining a tradition of literature and of philosophy that has its roots in the vernacular writings of medieval Dominicans (Greith), a tradition of quintessentially German thought, feeling, and language that materialized in the experience of medieval women, but that reached its zenith in the speculative heights of Eckhart (Preger), and a tradition that explains the ground on which the “masters” prove their greatness (Wentzlaff-Eggebert). As we have seen, gender is consistently a factor, though to varying degrees. By the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reception of Mechthild’s text, though, we see the linking of gender with the distinction between rational and irrational modes of discourse, a link that marks the legacy of the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment. Mechthild’s text is thus subsequently transmitted in association with other women’s texts in traditions for which a concept of immediacy and the category of women become synonymous.

The Category of Women and the Universal

The perception of Mechthild’s writing as immediate and feminine has endured into the twentieth century. As recently as 1987, for example, we find an anthology produced for the teaching of medieval German literature in the United States in which Mechthild’s book earns no mention, nor does any other female-authored text.⁶⁷ This lack does not result from an editorial decision to limit the volume to the conventional literary genres of epic, lyric, and romance, however. A chapter devoted to “Mystical Writers” includes an anonymous lyric followed by a number of excerpts from the works of the “three great masters”—Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse. The editor, Albert Wimmer, attempts to correct this error in his revised second edition (1991) by adding Hildegard of Bingen and Mechthild of Magdeburg to his list of Mystical Writers—“the two most significant representatives of medieval *Frauenmystik*,” even though Hildegard “predates *Frauenmystik* by almost a century and hardly fits the spiritual mold of its representatives.”⁶⁸ In addition to making several historical errors,⁶⁹ Wimmer’s commentary to the excerpts he supplies exhibits a strategy similar to Wentzlaff-Eggebert’s: He adopts the judgment that the mysticism of women like Mechthild has no relation to the “speculative, confrontational, masculine” work of Meister Eckhart.⁷⁰ In his notes to one particular section, for example, Wimmer remarks that

“[Mechthild’s] reference to *Funken* [sparks; II, 24] should not be interpreted in terms of the *Seelenfünklein* of Meister Eckhart [little spark in the soul]; rather ‘funken’ here signifies a minute fraction of the divine breath.”⁷¹ Wimmer does not elaborate but reveals his orientation here. Eckhart is the starting point, the frame of reference for his understanding of *Frauenmystik*, even though the two women writers he chooses to anthologize predate Eckhart. In the context of scholars’ tendency to privilege the speculative and philosophical in Eckhart’s work, the implication is that Mechthild’s spark is different and as such inferior to Eckhart’s, which in turn is part of a philosophical (read: better) system. Given the apparent gender bias in this narrative of medieval German literary history, however, this view must certainly be reconsidered. Indeed, as Amy Hollywood has argued, Eckhart’s writing indicates that he clearly “sought to place [the ideas of both Mechthild and her younger contemporary, Marguerite Porete] within the philosophical vocabulary he had at his disposal as a schoolman,” thereby granting “the beguines’ thought scholastic legitimacy while radically subverting the language of the schools.”⁷² Hollywood’s contextualization of this relationship puts the gendered distinctions that Wimmer inherits into sharp relief.

The fact that Wimmer’s anthology maintains the privileging of the masculine even when it includes writings by women is symptomatic of the problems generated when women are included in a tradition imagined and defined in opposition to the feminine. Masculine, speculative, and philosophical mysticism is defined in terms of how it is different from the *Gefühlsmystik* (emotional mysticism) of women. Yet, “merely moving the previously marginalized to the center” and making marginalized women the focal point⁷³—for example, taking *Frauenmystik* out of histories of mysticism and giving it center stage—does not correct the gender bias of the tradition. In recent works aimed in some cases explicitly at correcting gender imbalances in literary histories, the identification of immediate experience with the feminine has persisted. Peter Dronke’s 1984 study of *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, though not intended explicitly to change the medieval literary canon, had a profound impact on medieval studies. Its major accomplishment was its role in expanding notions of medieval literature to include religious and other “non-poetic” writings. Although Dronke chooses to focus more on Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) than on Mechthild of Magdeburg in his book, its importance for the field of study on medieval women that has emerged since its publication makes it relevant to this discussion. With the category “women writers,” Dronke selects female authors ranging from Perpetua, sentenced to death in Carthage in 203, to Marguerite Porete, burned at the stake in 1310, authors spanning eleven centuries of European history and half as many geographical regions. This approach stands in stark contrast to the German literary and religious historians whose tradition-making relied on linking a literary vernacular with a national past, one in which the role of women writers had to be explained as

secondary. For Dronke, choosing medieval women writers as his unifying principle disconnects the category of literature from the national. This strategy allowed him implicitly to question traditional disciplinary boundaries defined by ideas of nationhood that are anachronistic to the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, such a broad grouping also tends to lead to generalizations about women's essential being.

Anticipating this problem, Dronke expressly states that his intention is *not* to discover something identifiable as “femininity in writing” appearing in every “feminine” text.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, he offers some general observations on what the authors he has collected have in common, even, he adds, “if the qualities that might soonest help distinguish them as women writers are the ones hardest to analyze in purely literary terms” (x). The conflation of the category of biological women writers with a concept of the feminine soon becomes clear. “The women’s motivation for writing at all,” Dronke writes, “seems rarely to be predominantly literary: it is often more urgently serious than is common among men writers; it is a response springing from inner needs, more than from an artistic, or didactic, inclination.” Finally, Dronke concludes that the women he treats in his collection show “excellently a quality (literary, but also ‘metaliterary’) of immediacy.”⁷⁵ Implicit in these assertions is an assessment—following the standard at this time—in which the privileged norm for a work of literature is intellectually mediated, rational, and detached from emotion. These qualities, standing as they do in opposition to the “immediacy” of women writers in Dronke’s study, are defined and privileged as masculine and the domain of men. Scholars have since stressed the sociopolitical reasons for a woman writer’s perhaps more frequent expressions of the urgency of her project.⁷⁶ However, Dronke’s attribution of this quality to the essentially feminine reflects the potential for essentializing that continues to lurk in the category of “women.” The categories of analysis—literary versus springing from inner needs—arise out of the tradition in which Dronke is trained and which he clearly hopes to augment (indeed, while acknowledging that the writings he considers do not fit into traditional literary categories, his book nevertheless harbors an implicit, yet enthusiastic argument for their worthiness of scholarly attention). To be sure, what helps “distinguish them as women writers” is hardest to analyze in literary terms, for what since the rise of national literary disciplines in the nineteenth century is traditionally held to be literary is coded as masculine. Women writers are assumed to be purveyors of the feminine. Hence, while men write literature, women write women’s experience. The problem with shifting the focal point onto women is thus twofold: (1) the particularity—the specificity of the texts within different locations, historical moments, and circumstances of transmission—of the women writers is lost; and 2) writings by women become examples of essentialized female experience. The urgency or “immediacy” of the texts becomes a quality of being female.

Drawing a connection between immediacy and something essentially

feminine about women's writing was not uncommon in 1984. Luce Irigaray (see the epigraph to this chapter) celebrates the "relentless" immediacy of mystical texts, finding there an example of women's ability to take on the delimited language offered women by patriarchy. By embracing this language to excess, according to Irigaray, these women were able to dissolve the naturalized concepts of difference with which the language produces meaning.⁷⁷ Male-authored texts that demonstrate a similar kind of excess or immediacy do not disprove Irigaray's claim of what she calls *parlerfemme*; rather, these men fall "into the trap of mimicking" the women's mimicry (192). Irigaray's thesis is certainly compelling, but is in the end disturbingly imprecise. For one thing, she takes Angela of Foligno's writings as the basis for her hypotheses, in this case about women's mystical experience and speech. But the relationship between what is written in Angela's revelations and her experience of language is even more vexed than Mechthild's. We recall that Angela dictated her *Memorial* to her confessor who translated it into Latin as he wrote it down. Her later writings, grouped together under the title, *Instructions*, were probably written down by a number of different people—male scribes, fellow nuns, and some parts by Angela herself.⁷⁸ A closer examination of this collaborative authoring enterprise would at least complicate Irigaray's efforts to identify a specifically female language in mystical writings.⁷⁹

The point here is not, however, to negate the gains resulting from the anthologies and literary histories that take sexual difference as their main category of selection and classification.⁸⁰ Nor is it to negate the questions asked and pursued by feminist theorists like Irigaray, interested in breaking down the discourses in and with which women have historically been oppressed. The point is that these attempts to classify and describe women's writing, because they participate in and perpetuate the discourses of a literary tradition defined in opposition to them, tend to lead us down the wrong road.

A consideration of two anthologies of medieval women writers illustrates this problem further. In the same year as Dronke's study, Katharina Wilson edited and published an anthology of medieval women writers, which had an equally significant impact on the emerging field of the study of medieval women. Three years later, Marcelle Thiébaux edited and published another anthology, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, which is now in its second edition. The coverage of both of these anthologies is as broad as if not broader than Dronke's study, and as such must be seen as a response to the false belief, still widespread in 1984, that there were few if any literate women in the Middle Ages.⁸¹ Thiébaux's collection, including a wider range of text types, is thus devoted to proving the assertion that "[t]here were always women throughout the Middle Ages who could read and write" and that they did so in a wide variety of ways.⁸² The variety and breadth in this collection is indeed its most valuable asset. However, a reader of this anthology interested in Mechthild of Magdeburg would come away with a skewed view of her

writings, one that would support the early twentieth-century reading of them as immediate, emotional, and therefore feminine in opposition to the rational masculine. The selections included by Thiébaux are, except for one section from Book III, all from Book I of Mechthild's writings, the first chapters written after her confessor encouraged her to record her revelations in 1250.⁸³ While this first book is indeed dominated by an emotional, lyrical, and sometimes erotic tone—primarily because of Mechthild's creative engagement with the lyricism and eroticism of the Song—the emphasis in the following six books shifts toward a more rational and instructional approach to the visions and spiritual principles Mechthild is trying to convey.⁸⁴ Mechthild's book in its specificity is neither wholly immediate and "irrational" nor speculative and "rational," a fact that not only persistently resists the efforts to categorize it as such but that requires us to dispense with this binary altogether.

The selections from Mechthild's book included in Wilson's anthology reflect the many types of writing displayed in the book. The editor of this section, John Howard, pulls together chapters under several headings: autobiographical, criticism (of beguines and of the clergy), heaven and hell, and miscellany.⁸⁵ There is little chance, then, that a reader of these selections could come to the same conclusions as the reader of Thiébaux's. In her editorial comments, Wilson addresses the question acknowledged to be "the most fascinating" to her audience—how **these** women differed from their female successors and their male contemporaries. Yet she is careful not to confuse the common rhetorical and thematic characteristics displayed in the writings she chooses with essential or natural qualities of women. The fact that medieval women writers do not seem to write satire, for example, does *not* for Wilson reflect something about the female mind. Rather if things like narrative attitude or thematic focus are said to reflect the sex of an author, it is the author's apparent consciousness of her gender, that is, the author's social positioning and identification as a woman, to which Wilson refers.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Wilson's even-handed treatment is overshadowed by the breadth of cultures, languages, and contexts brought together under the rubric of medieval women writers. For the grouping exists in an intellectual and cultural context that continues to invite essentialist generalizations. Even the recent history of western mysticism by Kurt Ruh uses the category of *Frauenmystik* to define a distinct part (taking up most of Volume II) of his four volume work.⁸⁷ Ruh defines *Frauenmystik* as a body of texts including those written for women through dictation or report, those written by women themselves, and those that describe the lives of visionaries or other women living a blessed life (17). Despite alerting his readers to the surprising variety evident among these texts, he seems beholden to our nineteenth-century binaries when he reduces women's contribution to the history of mysticism as emotionality or affect. Amy Hollywood has since then demonstrated the inadequacy of characterizing women's mysticism in this way, as well as of

considering male-authored and female-authored texts without any attention given to the circumstances surrounding the texts' production.⁸⁸ Another new history of mysticism comparable to Ruh's in its scope is Bernard McGinn's new multivolume history *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*.⁸⁹ Volume Three of this history, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, comes closest to avoiding the problems that persist in Ruh's work.⁹⁰ By stressing the interrelation between men and women in religious circles in the thirteenth century, McGinn shows how the mystical texts by and about women in this period must be seen to emerge out of and to reflect an atmosphere of conversation between men and women religious. Because women do play a central role in the "vernacular mysticism" that emerges from this atmosphere, a chapter on the "three great Beguine mystics" (Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete) is the longest chapter of the book. But McGinn's study stresses the diversity among these texts and indeed, explicitly resists the persistent pressure to make generalizations about women or women's mysticism (xii).

It remains to be seen what impact McGinn's book will have on the teaching of the medieval mystics in literary studies departments. Anecdotally, I know that Marianne Kalinke at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign offered a course in the Spring of 2003 for which McGinn's history was a basic text and where the concept of *women's* mysticism was *not* used as an organizational category.⁹¹ Despite Wilson's even-handed treatment, and the hopeful prospects opened up by McGinn's new history (and even Ruh's, for the fascinating variety of the material he describes in the different volumes belies the generalizations he makes about *Frauenmystik* in his introduction), the problematic implications of the category of women writers will most likely continue to be with us for some time to come. But the complex story of Mechthild's textual transmission does offer us specific clues as to why this happens. As we have seen, when the text was included in a tradition meant for a general audience (for example, the medieval Dominican translators, or certain early scholars of mysticism and literature), the importance of Mechthild's authorship is undercut. For the Dominicans, her authorship was praised only insofar as it was downplayed (a claim made by invoking a tradition of female prophets). The status as literary monument accorded the text by Greith was overshadowed in subsequent scholarship on mysticism, which relegates the text to an inferior position as an unconscious precursor of the three male masters. Indeed, this elevation of Mechthild's poetry to monumental status is ironic, for it participates in defining the very concept of literature and literary tradition that in subsequent years can only include her text provisionally, if at all. When the tradition imagined is female, the problem of gender is both more ambiguous and yet more pronounced. The editor of the 1631 pamphlet proclaims a long tradition of learned women, but only for the purposes of girding up the patriarchal order that made the pamphlet necessary in the first place by limiting women's access to literacy

and education. Similarly, many of the anthologies of medieval women used today inherit the tendency we see developed in the nineteenth-century reception's linking of the feminine with immediacy, experience, and irrational thought or, in other words, linking women's writing simply with women.

Conclusion

In her 1986 collection of devotional literature by women, Elizabeth Petroff anticipates the questions of those who wonder why such literature should be studied: "Since most of the surviving texts written by women in the Middle Ages were devotional in intent, to ask why they should be studied is like asking why women writers in this period should be studied and also why women chose to write this kind of literature. One answer is that we study writers for what they tell us of the human condition, for what they reveal of human creativity and the uses of language; and we study women writers for the same reasons."⁹² Appealing to what literature reveals about humanity, to its potential for speaking for all, Petroff suggests, and I fully agree, that we study literature by women not because of what it says about women's nature or essence, but because it *should* say something *to all* about humanity and human history. This understanding of women as universal subjects is also the Utopian goal imagined by Simone de Beauvoir, who supplies the epigraph for this book. Toril Moi explains this aspect of Beauvoir's work: "Torn between their existence as women and their existence as human beings, women under patriarchy are obliged either to deny their specificity, or obsessively to focus on it."⁹³ In the context of literary studies, the academic focus on women has not yet fully surpassed this problem; female traditions thus continue to resonate as subsets of the universal human traditions peopled by men or as documentation of particular and essentialized female experience or feminine immediacy. The category of women writers finally does not have the same totalizing power as that of, say, "the English literary tradition" or "Medieval German literature." This conclusion leads us to the now familiar dilemma: It suggests, first, that the totalizing gesture involved in imagining a tradition is at least on some level an irrevocably and exclusively masculinist enterprise; and, second, that imagining countertraditions of women is for this reason *not* an effective avenue for canonical or curricular change.

Understanding this dilemma and moving toward its solution has been the project of this book. While acknowledging that the traditions "imagined" by Dronke's study and anthologies of medieval women writers have successfully resisted and changed totalizing assumptions about what counts as literature and about women's ability to write in the Middle Ages, we must now acknowledge the need for developing new strategies. Rather than critiquing a tradition of male authors with an account of Mechthild and other women writers of mystical texts, I have used the reception of *The Flowing Light* to

explore and interrogate the mechanisms and categories of tradition-making at different historical moments. Investigating the different instances of the Mechthild transmission helps us to comprehend more fully not only what happened to this text and its author but also that the history of its female authorship takes some unexpected turns.

The process of following these turns, as we have done in the previous chapters, forces us to acknowledge and think more critically about the categories of authorship, gender, and tradition that we use and construct in our work and teaching today. The situation of the Mechthild manuscripts, as should now be clear, certainly throws a traditional concept of authorship (conceived of as the sole determiner or originator of the text) into doubt, but it does not mean that to speak of authorship in relation to *The Flowing Light* is to speak anachronistically. Indeed, the situation of the manuscripts and the concerns of the various prologues prove that the earthly authorship of a religious text was indeed a salient issue for the authors, compilers, and readers of these texts. Mechthild's authorship clearly mattered both to her and to her readers. Moreover, a contextualization of the text allows us to see the traces of Mechthild's agency in her choice to write in the vernacular and in her unusual poetic prose. A result of this contextualization is a much more nuanced understanding of the political, cultural, and literary valence of vernaculars in the thirteenth-century Germany, as well as an awareness that some of today's standards for elevating religious texts in literary disciplines (originality based on concepts of dissent, unconventionality, or nonconformity) are not appropriate for evaluating a text like Mechthild's in which dissent turns out to be theologically conformist and poetically innovative at the same time.

The reading and contextualization of Mechthild's vision of the mass indicates not only that female authorship was a problem for her, but that, in responding to this problem, she was able to assert her authority as an author and a female body in unusual and striking ways. The specificity of Mechthild's response to ideologies about the body also helps us to see the problems with taking a single woman mystic's writings as transferrable to all mystics or all women. The transmission of *The Flowing Light* in compilations shows us how ideas about authorship and text change and take new shape in conjunction with the rise of vernacular mysticism and its cultural and institutional practices. In texts meant to foster an internal dialogue with God, earthly authorship had little importance. In an environment where bypassing church authority could prove hazardous, claiming authorship could be dangerous. In the context of the fifteenth-century observant movement, the problem of female authorship addressed by the early translators of Mechthild's book shifted to become a problem associated with women readers and scribes. The place of Mechthild's writings in this system of literary exchange, which favored reproduction and compilation over "original" composition, meant, paradoxically, that the dissemination of her writings facilitated their loss from view.

While named authorship is consistently more important in the Latin transmission and its legacy, Mechthild's *Lux divinitatis* also falls out of circulation by the seventeenth century. However, its place in the traditions constructed in this branch of the transmission has more to do with the category of holiness than that of authorship. Moreover, Mechthild's association with the nuns of Helfta means that her name and reputation become subsumed under the name of her spiritual sister, Mechthild of Hackeborn, revered as a noble woman and as a saint and whose revelations were much more widely circulated. Yet if the category of holiness ensured Mechthild of Hackeborn's transmission into modern times, the categories of vernacular literature and nation retrieved Mechthild of Magdeburg's book from oblivion and sent Mechthild of Hackeborn and her Latin revelations into the shadows. While, as we have seen, the dominant category of legitimation for the medieval material was a religious sense of orthodoxy based on the ultimate authority of God, in the postmedieval reception of Mechthild's writings, we see the emergence of an orthodoxy based on the authority of vernacular authorship. The nineteenth-century rediscovery and reception of Mechthild's book bears witness to this new orthodoxy in the construction of literary and philosophical traditions defined as German.⁹⁴ Here we find the roots of the problem of female authorship as it appears today. My analysis of this shift isolates a moment in which rationally produced knowledge becomes marked as masculine and irrationally produced knowledge (immediate experience) as feminine. Recent anthologies of medieval women's writing and medieval German literature attest to the continued strength of these gendered categories as well as to their overlapping with the distinction that makes the particular traditions formed around the category of women subordinate to the universal traditions formed around categories of national literature. The continued relegation of the study of women to the margins of academic disciplines like German Studies is explained by the persistence of this conceptual link. The problem of female authorship for scholars today is how to reach beyond it.

The implications of this study are that feminist challenges to the canon can no longer simply demand the inclusion of female authors. Rather, examining closely how and why they are or have been included becomes itself the feminist challenge, for this act of examination results in a rethinking of traditions and the ways they are formed conceptually and intellectually, but not solely along gender lines. As we have seen, exploring Mechthild's transmission reveals her text participating in the construction of religious, philosophical, *and* literary traditions. It also alerts us to the active presence of other women and men in these traditions as well as to very complex systems of literary exchange that emerged in response to particular historical circumstances. The alterity of these traditions, systems, and historical moments reminds us that the conceptual categories with which we work are not fixed. My analysis of Mechthild's textual transmission thus suggests a

critical practice in which becoming aware of the shape of theoretical problems in the past (for example, the problem of female authorship for Mechthild's Latin translators or for nineteenth-century historians of mysticism) is itself a moment of feminist resistance. That is, it is a moment when one's current view of an ideological problem is not only clarified in opposition to that of the past but also placed into question. Mechthild's medieval reception shows us not that she was excluded from canons of religious literature because she was a woman but rather that there were men who universalized her book because they believed it came through her from God. Mechthild's obscurity derives paradoxically from the success of the new mysticism and literary culture that her book helped to inaugurate. The association of women with traits like emotionality and immediacy surfaces not only in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century histories of mysticism but also in late twentieth-century anthologies of women writers. The connections between gender and textual authority are thus exposed as multiple and complex; conjectures about monolithic exclusionary canons must fall away. In attending to these illuminating histories and to the challenges they make to our own notions of gender and authority, I have tried to bring a historically and theoretically sensitive eye to Mechthild's book and its legacy. For me, as I hope for others, the best of this legacy would be a future in which a woman's life and the life of her work can at least momentarily reveal "the whole of reality," as well as all the contradictions that this implies.

Appendix A

Manuscript Transmission of Das fließende Licht der Gottheit

For each manuscript, I supply the manuscript designation (for example, Rb), the library that currently holds it, and its signature (call number), followed by a brief description of the contents, the date of the manuscript, and whether it is made with paper or parchment. Asterisked manuscripts (*) are those that I uncovered during my research. All other designations are from Hans Neumann's list in his edition of *Das fließende Licht*.¹

Latin Manuscripts (R stands for *Revelationes*)

Rb Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. B IX II

Latin compilation; contains Latin translation of Books I through VI; mid-fourteenth century; parchment.

Ra Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. A VIII 6

Latin compilation; closely related to Rb; early fifteenth century; paper

Rw Wolhusener Handschrift, Lucern, Romero Haus, Zentralbibliothek Luzern, N 175

Translation of Latin back into Middle High German; also contains Elisabeth of Schönau's writings; 1517; paper.

Middle High German Manuscripts

E Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Msc. 277

Contains complete Middle High German translation (f. 2^r–166^r) plus a number of short mystical tracts; dated to 1350–1400; parchment.

C Colmar, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 2137

Theological compilation manuscript; contains excerpts from all seven books; names Mechthild; dated to 1400–1450; paper.

Würzburg, Franziskanerkloster, Hs. I 110

German-Latin compilation; Mechthild section (sixty-nine chapters) dates to end of fourteenth century; paper.

Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Cod. Germ. 38

Collection of mystical tracts; contains twenty chapters from Mechthild; dated 1416 by scribe, Johannes Pellengrießer; paper.

Koblenz, Staatsarchiv, Hs. Nr. 43

Latin-German compilation with one chapter from Mechthild; fifteenth century; paper.

Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. theol. et phil. oct. 27

Mystical compilation manuscript; contains three chapters from Book I; dated 1462; paper.

Hagenburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. III. I. 4° 8

Mystical compilation manuscript; contains excerpts from four chapters; 1464; paper.

Münster, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. III. I. 4° 34

Mystical compilation manuscript; contains one chapter; 1474; paper.

Münster, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. III. I. 4° 32

Spruchsammlung of Engelhart of Ebrach with Mechthild excerpt; 1475–1500; paper.

Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. St. Georgen 78

Spruchsammlung of Engelhart of Ebrach with Mechthild excerpt; 1442; paper.

München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 181

Spruchsammlung of Engelhart of Ebrach that includes a quote from one Mechthild chapter; fourteenth century; parchment.

München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 116

Spruchsammlung of Engelhart of Ebrach with Mechthild excerpt; fifteenth century; parchment.

München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 172

Spruchsammlung of Engelhart of Ebrach with Mechthild excerpt; fourteenth century; parchment.

München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 411

Compilation including parts of Ebrach Spruchsammlung and Mechthild excerpt; 1436; paper.

Hidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg. 482

Spruchsammlung of Engelhart of Ebrach with Mechthild excerpt; fourteenth century; paper.

London, British Library, Add. 11430

Life and letters of Margaret Ebner; contains three Mechthild quotes in letters from Heinrich of Nördlingen to Margaret and at the end of the collection; sixteenth century; paper.

Appendix B

Würzburg, Franziskanerkloster, Hs. I 110 (paper)

Contents:²

Superscript numbers following folio numbers indicate front (*recto*) or back (*verso*) sides of the folio. The letters “a” and “b” indicate left and right column, respectively. *Inc.* (*Incipit*) indicates beginning line of a text; *expl.* (*explicit*) indicates closing line of text.

PART I (F. 1–39): (CA. 1352 AND 1395)

1^{ra}–9^{vb} Thomas Maulvelt (?). *Compendium de novis modis significandi [Et hec dicta de modis significandi magistri Thome Anglici dicti Maurvel ad presens sufficient. Explicit . . .]*.

9^{vb}–18^{ra} Grammar tract. (*Incipit compendium novum de construccione (et regimine).*) Anonymous.

18^{ra}–31^{ra} Grammar tract. *Compendium de regimine et constructione.* Anonymous.

31^{rb}–vb Collection of Sayings. [*Incipiunt proverbia philosophorum*]. Abridged version of a popular collection of sayings, total twenty-nine four-line sayings attributed to Robanus, Horace, Lucan, Ovid, Cato, Macrobius, Plato, Pythagoras, and Galen.

32^{ra}–37^{vb} Grammar tract. *Questio de regimine nominativi casus [Sic est questio de regimine nominativi finita et completa anno dominini M°CCC°*

quinquagesimo 2° in sexta feria post Quasi modo geniti etc.].
Anonymous.

38^{ra}-39^{vb} Grammar tract. End missing. [*Musa. que pars? nomen. Quare? quia significat substantiam cum qualitate propria vel communi.*] Anonymous.

PART II (F. 40^{ra}-62^{vb}) (CA. 1350-1375)

Mechthild von Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light* excerpts. Beginning lost. In the bound manuscript, the excerpts take up three quires. The roman numerals indicate the number of folios in each quire, arabic numerals indicate current folio number (for example, the first line means that the first quire is a set of three pieces of paper that, when folded, make six folios [12 pages]; “x” indicates a missing folio):

Current folio order:

~~III~~, 41, 42 / 43, 44, 45

~~IV~~, 47, 49 / 50, 51, 52, 53

~~V~~, 35, x, x, x, 56 / 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62

Original order:

~~IV~~x3 x, 49 / 50, 58, 59, 60

~~IV~~, 47, 48, 55 / 61, 51, 52, 53

~~V~~, 40, 42, 56, 41 / 44, 57, 43, 45, 62

PART III (F. 63^r-120^v) (CA. 1350-1365)

Identified as *Sermones de sanctis* by Peregrinus von Oppeln. Beginning and end are lost, however, so no attributions appear in the text.

PART IV (F. 121^r-24^v) (LATE. FOURTEENTH, EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY)

121^{r-v} University sermon, end is lost, unidentified, anonymous. [*Reverendi mei patres et domini, in presenti actu propter quem sumus congregati tria per ordinem habeo facere . . .*]

122^r-124^v University sermon outlines. Beginning and end are lost. Unidentified.

Appendix C

Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Cod. Germ. 38
(paper)

Contents:³

PART I (F. 1–134)

1^r-121^r (Heinrich Seuse) *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*; copied by Fridericus Pellengriesser, completed on February 27, 1416. Marginalia and table of contents written by a different hand.

Inc.: ES stuend ein prediger tze ainer zeit nach ainer metten vor ainem chreutz [crucifix] vnd chlaget got Jnnickchleich ... (A preacher once stood before the cross after Matins and quietly lamented to God . . .)

121^v-122^r Index to the *Little Book*

123^r-124^v (Heinrich Seuse) *Horologium sapientiae*; II, 7, in German translation, also by Pellengriesser, but breaks off unfinished.

Inc.: [V] Enite filij audite me Chembt her chinder vnd hört mich Chömbt vnd hört alle die got fürchten wie grozze ding hat got getan meiner Sel (Come, children, hear me, come here children and hear me, come and hear, all who fear God, what great things God has done to my Soul).

PART II (F. 135–225)

135^r-224^r (Marquard von Lindau) *Treatise on the Eucharist*; copied by Johannes D. No date is given, but probably contemporary with Seuse section. Oldest dated manuscript with this version of the treatise is 1421. Contemporary hand wrote critical remarks in the margins *Dasist nicht war* (177^v; that is not true); *Es ist wider die heylig schrift* (178^r; It is against holy scripture).

Inc.: *LJebster Juenger ob ich an siech den lauff der altenn ee Als due dikch von mir in grober weys gehort hast in den Adventen . . .* (Dearest Youth, if I look upon the course of the old testament as you frequently have heard from me in a coarse way during advent . . .)

PART III (F. 226–245)

226^r-245^r (Mechthild von Magdeburg) excerpts from *The Flowing Light*; also copied by Pellengriesser, not long after Seuse text, completed March 13, 1416. Same paper as Part I, same number of lines per page, same amount of page blocked out for writing. Written on two quires of six folios each. The outside folio of each was lost before binding— beginning and middle of copied text is lost.

Inc.: (Beginning missing (V, 4: 1–30) [als die sunne] *Von der höchsten stat herniderget Vnd sinkt vntz in die nacht/ waiz got also wirt an der Sel.* ([As the sun] Goes down from highest place and sinks into the night, God knows, so it happens to the soul.

245^v Prayer of Mardocheaus (Esther 13:9–11 and 15–17), attributed here to Esther (probably written by one of the marginal hands from Part I). *Inc.*: *In den zeitten do pat hester zu dem herren vnd sprach Her got almachtiger chunig . . .* (At the time when Esther prayed to the Lord and spoke, Lord God almighty king . . .)

Appendix D

Colmar, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 2137 (paper)

Contents:[4](#)

MODERN NUMBERING

1r-3v Table of Contents in contemporary hand

4r-v blank

MEDIEVAL NUMBERING

1r-7v *Dis sind die gebot der nuwen E* (These are the commandments of the new Law).

7v-62v (Monk of Heilsbronn) *Dis ist von den sehs namen des heiligen sacrament jhu xpi* (These are the six names of the Holy Sacrament Jhesu Christi).

62v-70v Sermon on 1 John 3: 18 *Inc.: Paulus filioli omnia per scripta non dilatis verbo nec lingua sed opere et veritate Dise materie leret gottes guetin* (My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth. This material teaches God's goodness).

70v-77v von rehtem Jomer (Of righteous Lament) *Inc.: Reht jomer ist edeler*

denne rehte froeide (Righteous lament is nobler than righteous joy).

77^v-141^r Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*

141^v blank

142^r-159^r *wie alle creaturen fride suochent und lident dar waz sú geliden moegent vnd wie núcze uns liden ist* (How all creatures seek peace and suffer because of it, what they can suffer and how suffering can be useful to us).

159^v blank

160^r-164^r (Johannes Tauler) *Ein bredige wie jhesus erschein sinen jungeren vnd sprach fride sie mit úch* (A sermon on how Jesus appeared to his apostles and spoke: peace be with you [John 20:19]).

165^r-171^v *Inc.: Christstoffelus der heilige waz búrtig von cananea dem lande gar gros an dem libe* (Christopher the saint was born of the land of Canaan [and was] quite large in body).

171^v-172^v blank

173^r-179^r *Sant alexus leigende ein Roemer* (Saint Alexis, layman [and] a Roman).

Notes

Preface

1. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit. Nach der Einsiedler Handschrift in kritischem Vergleich mit der gesamten Überlieferung*, ed. Hans Neumann, prepared for print by Gisela Vollmann-Profe, 2 vols. (Munich: Artemis, 1990 and 1993). Hereafter parenthetical citations to Mechthild's book will indicate book, chapter: and lines. Diphthongs written with superscript in the edition are written out as *oe*, *uo*, *ue*, etc. The best English translation to date is based on the Neumann edition: Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998). I have used Tobin's excellent translation as a reference; however, unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2. See, for example, Elizabeth Spearing, ed., *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (New York: Penguin, 2002); Carolyn Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1987/1994); Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

3. The three major theorists of women's writing and female subjectivity within patriarchy are, of course, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. For examples of their groundbreaking works, see Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 309–20; Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

4. For early explorations of women writers, see Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979). For an analysis that continues to be insightful and useful of both early French feminist theory and Anglo-American recovery of female authors, see Toril Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1985).

5. For the most recent and to my mind most nuanced contribution to this line of scholarship, see Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Summit shows how the figure of the woman writer was central to the development of an idea of an English literary tradition in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance because the field of English letters at that time was, like the imagined woman writer, outside and alienated from the mainstream classical canon of Latin and Greek writers. As Summit remarks in her conclusion, once the English tradition was established, however, with Chaucer as its father, it was defined in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an exclusively masculine line (209).

6. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, vii.

7. This is especially true in English literary studies. The bibliography on this topic is voluminous, but for some more recent examples, which both continue the project of recovery and raise questions about it, see Jessica Munns, "Canon Fodder: Women's Studies and the (British) Literary Canon," in *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. Jan Gorak (New York: Garland, 2001), 17–27; Mary Poovey, "Recovering Ellen Pickering," *Tale Journal of Criticism* 13 (2000): 437–52; Isobel Grundy, "(Re)Discovering Women's Texts," in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700–1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 179–96; Elizabeth Eger, "Fashioning a Female

Canon: Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and the Politics of the Anthology,” in *Women’s Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730–1820*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 201–15; Jane Dowson, “Anthologies of Women’s Poetry: Canon-Breakers; Canon-Makers,” in *British Poetry from the 1950s to the 1990s: Politics and Art*, ed. Gary Day and Brian Docherty (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 237–52; Ellen G. Friedman, “Where Are the Missing Contents? (Post) Modernism, Gender, and the Canon,” *PMLA* 108 (1993): 240–52; and Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

8. For a summary of the canon debates from a German feminist perspective, see Renate von Heydebrand and Simone Winko, “Geschlechterdifferenz und literarischer Kanon: Historische Beobachtungen und systematische Überlegungen,” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 19.2 (1994): 96–172. For works recovering German women writers, see Elke P. Frederiksen and Elizabeth G. Ametsbichler, eds., *Women Writers in German-Speaking Countries: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998); Barbara Hahn, *Unter falschem Namen: Von der schwierigen Autorschaft der Frauen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991); Lydia Schieth, *Frauenliteratur* (Bamberg: Buchners Verlag, 1991); Gisela Brinker-Gabler, ed., *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, 2 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988); and Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann, eds., *Frauen Literatur Geschichte: Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985). For anthologies, see Michelle Stott and Joseph O. Baker, eds., *Im Nonnengarten: An Anthology of German Women’s Writing 1850–1907* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1997); Jeannine Blackwell and Susanne Zantop, eds., *Bitter Healing: German Women Writers from 1700 to 1830: An Anthology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Susan L. Cocalis, ed., *The Defiant Muse: German Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1986).

9. Walter Erhart, “Kanonisierungsbedarf und Kanonisierung in der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft (1945–1995),” in *Kanon Macht Kultur: Theoretische, historische und soziale Aspekte ästhetischer Kanonbildung*, ed. Renate von Heydebrand (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 116–17. When this paper was delivered, it drew debate from several feminists in the audience. Gisela Brinker-Gabler contested Erhart’s assertion that there had been few or no feminist literary studies appearing in Germany, citing a number of them from memory. She did acknowledge, however, that American Germanists had made more progress than Germans in terms of what they were able to research and teach. Barbara Hahn, in contrast, argued that the canon had been expanded further in Germany than in the United States, but she remarked that feminist approaches in literary studies such as dissertations or habilitations in Germany were still regarded as unacceptable. Erhart’s response to these comments was to modify his thesis as follows: “Statt von einer Etablierung der feministischen Literaturwissenschaft könne eher schon von ihrem Scheitern die Rede sein: Weder gebe es eine Integration von Frauenliteratur in den literaturwissenschaftlichen Kanon noch die Einrichtung eines entsprechenden Gegenkanons.” Friederike Worthmann, “Diskussionsbericht: Theoretische und methodische Grundlagen,” in *Kanon Macht Kultur*, ed. von Heydebrand, 131. The truth of Erhart’s remark about the lack of a German counter-canon of women writers is born out by the relative absence of anthologies of female-authored texts published in Germany.

10. Jeffrey Sammons claims that the expansion of the canon has been largely successful in both the United States and Germany, although he nevertheless bewails this fact, continuing to teach his introduction to German literature “as canonical as I know how to make it.” Jeffrey L. Sammons, “The Land Where the Canon B(l)ooms: Observations on the German Canon and Its Opponents, There and Here,” in *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. Jan Gorak (New York: Garland, 1998), 122 and 128. Curiously, the more “open” canon he laments lacks any additions of women writers.

11. Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), 209.

12. Two recent studies of medieval male authors are Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

13. Elke Frederiksen, “The Challenge of ‘Missing Contents’ for Canon Formation in German Studies,” in *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of Nation*, ed. Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1997), 103.

14. Some prominent universities electing to go without medievalists for the time being (as of Fall 2003) are the University of Washington Seattle, the University of Toronto, Columbia University,

Vanderbilt University, and Stanford University. Although it continues to have a medievalist on staff, Pennsylvania State University seems headed in this direction. The Johns Hopkins University has long modeled itself as a post-1750 program.

15. Hinrich C. Seeba, "Fo(u)r Contexts: The Canon and Institutional History," in *Rethinking Germanistik: Canon and Culture*, ed. Robert Bledsoe et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 7. Jeffrey Sammons notes that postwar academics also turned to the neglected works of "'classical modernity,' particularly Expressionism," but only insofar as they were "conservative, religious, antimodern, apolitical, and evasive of the immediate past." Sammons, "The Land Where the Canon B(l)ooms," 121. In agreement with Seeba, Anna Kuhn remarks that, until the late 1980s, this canon of German classics had not undergone the kind of critical rethinking in the United States that occurred in Germany in the wake of the student movements of 1968; Anna Kuhn, "Canon as Narrative: A Feminist Reading," in *Rethinking Germanistik*, ed. Bledsoe, 98. Kuhn sees less change occurring in the literary canon as a result of these discussions than does Seeba, particularly with regard to broadening the traditional canon to include women writers.

16. Erhart, "Kanonisierungsbedarf," 116.

17. Sammons, "The Land Where the Canon B(l)ooms," 127.

18. See Russell Berman's provocative critique of "anticanonism" for its neglect or repression of the past, in particular the "colloquy of the culture" across time that is inherent in a literary canon; Russell Berman, "Cultural Studies and the Canon: Some Thoughts on Stefan George," *Profession* (1999): 175.

Introduction

1. Because of the references and allusions to courtly language and culture in the early parts of Mechthild's book and the interest shown in various political events in the vicinity, scholars have concluded that Mechthild came from a family of lower or middle nobility, possibly of the ministerial class. Hans Neumann, "Mechthild von Magdeburg," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al., vol. 6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 260; Frank Tobin, "Introduction," in Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, 4; Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 49–52. For courtly language, see Book I, for an example of political events, consider Chapter 28 of Book VII, which discusses the effects of a war in Saxony and Thuringia on convents. This conflict is generally thought to be a family dispute between Earl Albrecht the Degenerate, his concubine and later second wife Kunigunde of Eisenberg, and their son, Apitz, in 1281. See Hans Neumann, "Beiträge zur Textgeschichte des *Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit* und zur Lebensgeschichte Mechthilds von Magdeburg," in *Alteutsche und Altniederländische Mystik*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 196–99, for a discussion of the debates surrounding the dating of this section. For information on the ministerials, see John B. Freed, *Noble Bondsmen: Ministerial Marriages in the Archdiocese of Salzburg, 1100–1343* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

2. Beguines often lived together in communities, sometimes in cloistered settings, sometimes not. Some women chose the beguine life simply by living in a separate space in their own homes. Others chose to become recluses, living in town squares. Although not officially in religious orders, beguines were not completely independent of institutional hierarchies. Wherever they were and in whatever forms they lived, they were always supervised by some kind of clerical presence, for as devout women religious, they needed the sacraments and confession, which could be supplied only by the male clergy. Most often, this supervision was handled by the mendicant orders—that is, either the Franciscans or the Dominicans. The standard works on the beguines are still Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), and Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan with an introduction by Robert E. Lerner (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). For research on specific communities that raises new questions about previous characterizations of the beguines, see Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Penelope Galloway, "'Discreet and Devout Maidens': Women's Involvement in Beguine Communities in Northern France, 1200–1500," in

Medieval Women in Their Communities, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 92–115; Martina Spies, *Beginnengemeinschaften in Frankfurt am Main: Zur Frage der genossenschaftlichen Selbstorganisation von Frauen im Mittelalter* (Dortmund: Ebersbach, 1998); Günter Peters, “Die Bremer Beginen im Mittelalter: Entstehung und Struktur einer städtischen Frauengemeinschaft,” *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 64 (1992): 131–81; and Martina Wehrli-Johns, “Das mittelalterliche Beginentum – Religiöse Frauenbewegung oder Sozialidee der Scholastik? Ein Beitrag zur Revision des Begriffes ‘religiöse Bewegungen,’” in “*Zahlreich wie die Sterne des Himmels*”: *Beginen am Niederrhein zwischen Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, ed. P. Modler and S. Lennartz (Bergisch Gladbach: Thomas-Morus-Akademie Bensberg, 1992), 9–39.

3. This is the prologue to the Latin translation found in manuscript Rb. See Appendix A.

4. For the exact quotation, see Chapter 3, n. 42, and Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik* (Amsterdam: P. Shippers N. V., 1882/1966), 246–47.

5. The Dominican order, also referred to as the Order of Preachers, was founded in 1216 by St. Dominic. Its founding principles were, first, to live a life of poverty modeled on the lives of the Apostles and, second, to teach and instruct true doctrine through preaching. On the Dominican order generally, see William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order*, 2 vols. (New York: Alba House, 1965 and 1973).

6. There are nineteen manuscripts in all. See Appendix A.

7. Carl Greith, *Die deutsche Mystik im Prediger-Orden (von 1250–1350); nach ihren Grundlagen, Liedern und Lebensbildern, aus handschriftlichen Quellen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1861/1965). Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechthild von Magdeburg oder das fließende Licht der Gottheit, aus der einzigen Handschrift des Stiftes Einsiedeln*, ed. P. Gall Morel (Regensburg: Georg Josef Manz Verlag, 1869).

8. Solesmes Monks (Louis Paquelin), ed., *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, vol. 2: *Sanctae Mechthildis virginis ordinis Sancti Benedicti Liber specialis gratiae; accedit sororis Mechthildis ejusdem ordinis Lux divinitatis* (Poitiers and Paris: Oudin, 1877). The Latin version of Mechthild’s book will hereafter be referred to as *Lux divinitatis*. Page numbers will refer to Paquelin’s edition.

9. Alistair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 2.

10. There are many variations on this type of authorship quandary—e.g., Angela of Foligno, some of whose writings are dictated and then written down in Latin, some perhaps written by her; Margery Kempe, who had two scribes write down her dictated revelations; Julian of Norwich, for whom we have two versions, one of them a revision and an expansion of the first; and Heinrich Seuse, whose *vita* purports to be based in part on the notes taken about his religious life by one of his spiritual daughters.

11. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2.

12. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 28–29.

13. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 297, quoted in Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 39.

14. See especially Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 3: *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998). For the concept of vernacular theology, see Nicholas Watson, “Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God,” *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 85–124; and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

15. Interestingly, vernacular theology in England was inspired primarily by continental Latin writings (or Latin translations of vernacular works as in the case of Marguerite Porete’s *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, or Heinrich Seuse’s *Book of Eternal Wisdom*), which were translated into English and modified to fit specific needs and audiences. See the essays in Rosalynn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996).

16. Mechthild, Beatrice, and Hadewijch; see Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

17. There are over 250 manuscripts, for example, of Seuse’s *Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit* (“Little Book of Wisdom”).

18. On Richard Rolle, see Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

19. It should be noted that Julian's and Margery's works differ considerably and that Margery Kempe dictated her book to two different scribes while Julian wrote and then revised her revelations herself. On Julian of Norwich, see, Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming 2004); on Margery's authorship, see for example, Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); on Margery's medieval and early modern reception, see Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 126–38.

20. Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 1.

21. *Ibid.*, 3.

22. Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum: Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988). Because Peters's book has become one of the benchmark studies of mystical literature by women and because my project contests its implication that feminist approaches to medieval texts are inevitably ahistorical, I lay out my disagreements here in some detail.

23. This trend grew primarily out of the writings of Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. D. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–38; and Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 142–48.

24. Peters rightly points out the worst offenders as Margret Bäurle and Lucia Braun, "Ich bin heiser in der Kehle meiner Keuschheit: Über das Schreiben der Mystikerinnen," in *Frauen Literatur Geschichte: Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), 1–15 and 509–10, who use poststructuralist theory without much attention to Mechthild's text; Eva Schirmer, *Mystik und Minne: Frauen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1984), who, without a background in theology, claims that Mechthild was the first feminist theologian; and, for similar reasons, Ilse Langner, "Vorläuferinnen der Emanzipation? Drei Nonnen – Drei Dichterinnen," *Neue Deutsche Hefte* 163 (1979): 497–511. Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 2 n. 4.

25. The authoritative piece on Mechthild's biography is Hans Neumann, "Beiträge zur Textgeschichte des *Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit*." For a lucid account of the trends in Mechthild scholarship, see Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995).

26. Peter Dinzelsbacher, "Zur Interpretation erlebnismystischer Texte des Mittelalters," *ZfdA* 117 (1988): 3; *idem*, "Europäische Frauenmystik des Mittelalters: Ein Überblick," in *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dinzelsbacher and Dieter R. Bauer (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1984), 11–23; and Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981), 1 and 57ff. See also Susanne Köbele's lucid discussion of these late twentieth-century debates about the sociohistorical versus literary value of mystical texts. Susanne Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit: Zur Struktur mystischer Rede im Spannungsfeld von Latein und Volkssprache* (Tübingen: Francke, 1993), 21–26. The Anglo-American version of this debate revolves around the question of voice, which can also make the woman author disappear, although it is an effort to keep her from doing so. See, for example, the essays in Catherine M. Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

27. Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 2 n. 4.

28. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century," *Women's Studies* 11 (1984): 179–214.

29. Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 56–57 and 120–21.

30. *Ibid.*, 192.

31. The question of agency is a loud silence throughout Peters's work. The argument that a mystical text like Mechthild's is a literary construct leads inevitably to the question of who did the constructing, a question that Peters does not address.

32. Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit*, 22.

33. Ursula Peters, "Hofkleriker – Stadtschreiber – Mystikerin: Zum literarhistorischen Status dreier Autorentypen," in *Autorentypen*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 29–49.

34. "Ein Autor wird für uns erst durch die Überlieferung konstituiert." Burghart Wachinger, "Autorschaft und Überlieferung," in *Autorentypen*, ed. Haug and Wachinger, 1.

35. Wachinger, "Autorschaft und Überlieferung," 2–3.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 3–4. We might also think of Chaucer here, whose authorship was, according to Seth Lerer, invented by those who transmitted his works in the fifteenth century. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

38. Joseph Bédier is known as one of the earliest to critique Lachmann's methods, "La tradition manuscrite du *lai de l'ombre*: Réflexions sur l'art d'éditer les anciens textes," *Romania* 54 (1928): 161–96, 321–56. For a more recent and succinct outline of this critique, see Jürgen Kühnel, "Der 'offene Text': Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte volkssprachiger Texte des Mittelalters," in *Akten des V. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Cambridge 1975*, ed. Leonard Forster and Hans-Gert Roloff (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976), 311–21. The issue has been taken up with much more force in the 1990s; see "The New Philology," ed. Stephen Nichols, *Speculum* 65, Special Issue (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1990). For responses to this issue, see Karl Stackmann, "Neue Philologie?" in *Modernes Mittelalter: Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. Joachim Heinzle (Frankfurt: Insel, 1994), 398–427; Joachim Bumke, "Der unfeste Text: Überlegungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik der höfischen Epik im 13. Jahrhundert," in "*Aufführung*" und "*Schrift*" in *Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 118–29; the articles in *Philologie als Textwissenschaft: Alte und neue Horizonte*, ed. Helmut Tervooren and Horst Wenzel, *ZfdPh* 116, Special Issue (1997); and Werner Williams-Krapp, "Die überlieferungsgeschichtliche Methode: Rückblick und Ausblick," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 25.2 (2000): 1–21.

39. It should be noted that Joachim Bumke argues against this continued insistence upon the notion that one author is responsible for a given medieval epic or romance, contending that, because numerous versions of most of them exist, scholars hardly have the right to make claims about, for example, Hartmann von Aue's understanding of marriage in *Iwein*. Rather, they should be discussing the understanding of marriage in Version A or B. Bumke, "Der unfeste Text," 129.

40. Kurt Ruh and Gundolf Keil et al., eds., *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977-).

41. H. L. Hix, *Morte d'Author: An Autopsy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 10.

42. Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 2.

43. Jacqueline T. Miller, *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6 and 9–11; and Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 12. See also Walter Haug, "Wege der Befreiung von Autorität: Von der fingierten Quelle zur göttlichen Inspiration," in *The Construction of Textual Authority in German Literature of the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. James F. Poag and Claire Baldwin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 31–48.

44. Christiane Nisters, "Der *gepineget licham*: Zur Bedeutung des 'Autorinnenkörpers' für die Wahrheitslegitimation des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*," in *Literalität und Körperlichkeit Littéralité et Corporalité*, ed. Günter Krause (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1997), 21.

45. Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), 3.

46. Jane Burns suggests a similar reading of the female protagonists in courtly love literature where "agency emerges ... as a relational dynamic between individual protagonists and the social formations surrounding them." E. Jane Burns, "Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition," *Signs* 27 (2001): 49.

47. Discussing the problem of women's simultaneous presence and absence in the records of Anglo-Saxon culture, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing write: "Bluntly speaking, we know women were present, but we are everywhere faced with their absence from the cultural record, or with a source that allows us only a partial glimpse of any level of women's 'real' lives." Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 1.

48. Rosalynn Voaden, "The Company She Keeps: Mechthild of Hackeborn in Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 51–69.

Chapter 1

1. My comments on the developments in Christianity in the thirteenth century draw primarily on Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 3: *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998). See also Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan with an introduction by Robert E. Lerner (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); John B. Freed, *The Friars and German Society in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1977); R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970); and the essays in Gert Melville, ed., *Die Bettelorden im Aufbau: Beiträge zu Institutionalisierungsprozessen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum* (Münster: LIT, 1999).

2. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 13.

3. For various perspectives on this topic, see Barbara Newman, “La mystique courtoise: Thirteenth-Century Beguines and the Art of Love,” in *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, ed. Barbara Newman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 137–67; Sara S. Poor, “Medieval Incarnation(s) of Self: Subjectivity and Authority in the Writings of Mechthild von Magdeburg” (Dissertation, Duke University, 1994), 1–33; William Seaton, “Transformation of Convention in Mechthild von Magdeburg,” *Mystics Quarterly* 10.2 (1984): 64–72; and Elizabeth Wainwright-de Kadt, “Courtly Literature and Mysticism: Some Aspects of Their Interaction,” *Acta Germanica* 12 (1980): 41–60. Laying the groundwork for the analysis of the literary aspects of Mechthild’s prose, and in particular, her adoption of courtly motifs and language is Wolfgang Mohr, “Darbietungsformen der Mystik bei Mechthild von Magdeburg,” in *Marchen, Mythos, Dichtung: Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag Friedrich von der Leyens*, ed. Hugo Kuhn and Kurt Schier (Munich: Beck, 1963), 375–99. For a study that downplays the importance of courtly lyric as an influence, stressing instead the significance of the Psalms as a literary and conceptual model for Mechthild’s work, see Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 147–82.

4. For accounts of the involvement of women in the religious movements of the thirteenth century, see, for example, Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

5. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 15.

6. The others are Hadewijch and Beatrice of Nazareth, who wrote their vernacular mystical treatises (Middle Dutch) a decade or so before Mechthild began writing (1250). “New mysticism” is McGinn’s formulation. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 12. “Vernacular theology” is a term coined by both McGinn and Nicholas Watson. See Bernard McGinn, “Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of Vernacular Theology,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 6–14; and Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” *Speculum* 70 (1995): 823–24 n. 4, where Watson defines vernacular theology as referring to any kind of writing in the vernacular that communicates theological information to an audience. He uses the term *theology* primarily to counterbalance an earlier tendency in English medieval studies to understand the vernacular as crude or simple as opposed to a more sophisticated Latin literary culture. Although vernacular religious writings in German have not suffered the same degree of condescension, using the term *vernacular theology* nevertheless serves the same purpose in the continental context—that is, to focus “our attention on the specifically intellectual content of vernacular religious texts.” For more on vernacular theory, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), which also includes several theoretical and historical essays.

7. Susanne Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit: Zur Struktur mystischer Rede im Spannungsfeld von Latein und Volkssprache* (Tübingen: Francke, 1993), 26 n. 37, citing Kurt Ruh,

Meister Eckhart: *Theologie, Prediger, Mystiker*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 1989), 44: "Die Frage nach der Volkssprache scheint sich mir hier nicht vom Publikum und der Zweckbestimmung her beantworten zu lassen. Sie liegt in der Sprache selbst und im Sprecher der Sprache."

8. Nicholas Watson, "Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 85–124.

9. *Ibid.*, 90.

10. Heinrich Denifle, "Meister Eckharts lateinische Schriften, und die Grundschauung seiner Lehre," *Archiv für Literatur- und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* 2 (1886): 527; and more recently, Otto Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle Theologie: Zu Meister Eckharts Auseinandersetzung mit der Frauenfrömmigkeit seiner Zeit* (Munich: Artemis, 1987). On the demands placed on the male clergy to provide spiritual guidance and supervision to religious women, see John B. Freed, "Urban Development and the 'Cura Monialium' in Thirteenth Century Germany," *Viator* 3 (1972): 311–27. On the influence of this continental situation on later English mystics, see Janette Dillon, "Holy Women and Their Confessors or Confessors and Their Holy Women? Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 115–40.

11. Walter Haug, "Das Wort und die Sprache bei Meister Eckhart," in *Zur deutschen Literatur und Sprache des 14. Jahrhunderts: Dubliner Colloquium 1981*, ed. Walter Haug (Heidelberg: Winter, 1983), 39; cited in Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit*, 44, who adds as a counterpoint, a quote from Kurt Ruh: "es verhält sich vielmehr so, daß einzig und allein Eckharts Predigten und Traktate in deutscher Sprache *sermo mysticus* sind . . . , daß Eckharts religiöses Anliegen, das Charisma seiner Botschaft von der Gottesgeburt in der menschlichen Seele, offensichtlich einzig im Medium der Volkssprache adäquaten Ausdruck finden konnte" (rather it seems that only Eckhart's sermons and tracts in German are *sermo mysticus* . . . that Eckhart's religious agenda, the charisma of his message of the birth of God in the human soul, clearly could only find adequate expression in the medium of the vernacular). Kurt Ruh, "Vorbemerkungen zu einer neuen Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik im Mittelalter," in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984), 360.

12. In the context of English mysticism (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), the vernacular's association with female audiences becomes entwined with the social understanding of the laity. Nicholas Watson points to Johannes de Caulibus's *Meditationes vitae Christi*, for instance, as "perhaps the most striking example of the tendency to equate women religious and the laity as target audiences, and to think of both the laity and the vernacular as symbolically female in consequence." Nicholas Watson, "The Politics of Middle English Writing," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., 343.

13. See the discussion of Peters's book and its implications in my Introduction.

14. "Dis buoch das sende ich nu ze botten allen geistlichen lüten beidiu boesen und guoten" (Prologue, 3–4). This motif of God sending a book of His word written down by a prophet finds its biblical origin in Apocalypse 1:11; "What thou seest, write in a book, and send to the seven churches which are in Asia." All references to biblical passages refer to the Latin Vulgate and its English translation: B. Fischer et al. eds., *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969/1994); and *The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate and Diligently Compared with the Hebrew, Greek, and Other Editions* (New York: The Douay Bible House, 1941). Nevertheless, there has been significant debate about whether this prologue represents the voice of God or Mechthild's authoritative "I." For Mechthild as "I," see Alois Maria Haas, "Mechthild von Magdeburg—Dichtung und Mystik," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 2 (1972): 105–56. However, because the passage comes from a chapter in Book II (II, 26) where God is clearly the speaker, and because God is also asked to name the book in what follows, it seems safe to read this "I" as God's. For this and related arguments, see Klaus Grubmüller, "Sprechen und Schreiben: Das Beispiel von Mechthild von Magdeburg," in *Festschrift Walter Haug und Burghart Wachinger*, ed. Johannes Janota et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 335–48; Eberhard Nellman, "Dis buoch bezeichnet alleine mich: Zum Prolog von Mechthilds *Fließendem Licht der Gottheit*," in *Gates und der werlde hulde: Literatur in Mittelalter und Neuzeit; Festschrift für Heinz Rupp zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Stuttgart: Francke, 1989), 200–205; and Nigel F. Palmer, "Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg," in *Bildhafte Rede in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion*, ed. Wolfgang Harms and Klaus Speckenbach (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 217–35.

15. "mit der maht und mit der stimme aller creaturen" (VI, 7: 26).

16. See the literature cited in note 3.

17. A. P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the Medieval History*

of the Slavs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

18. For the role of colonization in the historical linguistic developments for this area, see Karl Bischoff, "Siedlungsbewegung und Sprachentwicklung im ostniederdeutschen Raum," in *Sprachgeschichte: Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*, ed. Werner Besch, Oskar Reichmann, and Stefan Sonderegger, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), 1268–74.

19. Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), viii.

20. "Anno domini M^oCC^oL fere per annos xv liber iste fuit teutonice cuidam begine" is translated into German in the same foreword as, "In dem jare von gottes gebürte drizehendhalb hundert jar bis dar nach fünfzehn jaren wart dis buoch geoffent in túsche von gotte einer swester" (Latin Foreword, 1–2 and 33–34). That "cuidam begine" is translated as "einer swester," suggests that "sister" was a more generic form of address to a religious woman, whether she was a nun in an order, or not. This would contradict Ursula Peters's contention (based on the use of "sister" in this foreword) that Mechthild had entered the convent at Helfta much earlier than in her old age, and that she was a nun the entire time she was writing. Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum: Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. Und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), 64–65.

21. An English translation of the prologue to the Latin translation appears in Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 31–33.

22. This is Köbele's formulation, although she is of course not the first to remark on Mechthild's significance to the history of German literature. Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit*, 33–34. For a discussion of the reception of Mechthild's text after its nineteenth century discovery, see Chapter 5 in this book.

23. Susanne Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster: Historische Funktion und rhetorische Legitimation frauenmystischer Texte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999); Marie-Luise Ehrenscheidtner, "Puellae litteratae: The Use of the Vernacular in the Dominican Convents of Southern Germany," in *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 49–71.

24. Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 6. How much the writings were polished is a matter of debate. See Joan Ferrante, "Scribe quae vides et audis: Hildegard, Her Language, and Her Secretaries," in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 102–35. Ferrante points out that in one of Hildegard's works, God delivers an injunction against tampering with His work. Ferrante thus "find[s] it hard to believe that Hildegard would have allowed men to do what God forbade" (109).

25. Anne L. Clark, "Holy Woman or Unworthy Vessel? The Representations of Elisabeth of Schönau," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 37.

26. Clark, "Holy Woman or Unworthy Vessel?," 35.

27. Kurt Köster, "Elisabeth von Schönau: Werk und Wirkung im Spiegel der mittelalterlichen handschriftlichen Überlieferung," *Archiv für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 3 (1951): 315. In other parts of Europe, although the holy women are not writing down their mystical experiences themselves, the accounts of their lives are also recorded in Latin. Two examples here would be the vitae of two other visionaries: Christine of Markyate from England (c. 1096–1155/66) and Marie of Oignies from France (1177–1213).

28. The tradition taken up by Elisabeth stems from the apocalyptic visions of the Bible and from dream-visions of otherworld journeys of which those told by Gregory the Great in his Dialogues are said to be typical. The changes introduced by Hildegard and Elisabeth include a shift in focus from what is seen (i.e., in the otherworld) to the experience of the seer, and the occurrence of the visions in the framework of prayer and meditation (as opposed to out of the blue), a framework that prepares the seer for and even leads to the experience. Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: A Twelfth-Century Visionary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 78–80.

29. Rupertsberg was Hildegard's monastery.

30. Roger De Ganck, ed. and trans., *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth 1200–1268* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), xiii–xvii.

31. Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 16.

32. Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Vogeler, eds., *Leben und Offenbarungen der Wiener Begine Agnes Blannbekin (+1315)* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1994); and Agnes Blannbekin, *Agnes Blannbekin*,

Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations, trans. Ulrike Wiethaus (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

33. Dinzelbacher and Vogeler, eds., *Leben und Offenbarungen der Wiener Begine*, 282–85.

34. Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 80.

35. For Angela's works, see Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance, O.F.M., (New York: Paulist Press, 1993). For a study of her collaboration with "Brother A," see Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A. in the Composition of Angela of Foligno's Revelations," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 34–63.

36. For Margery's book, see Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996); and Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (New York: Penguin Books, 1994). Margery, like her contemporary Julian of Norwich (1343–after 1416), lives much later than the thirteenth-century continental mystics I discuss here, but, as Janette Dillon has shown, Margery's mysticism, in particular the way it is closely linked to her relationship with her Dominican confessor, can be tied to continental models, which were received in England. Dillon, "Holy Women and Their Confessors."

37. This is particularly the case for Hildegard's *Scivias*.

38. Barbara Newman, "La mystique courtoise: Thirteenth-Century Beguines and the Art of Love." On the documents surrounding the condemnation, see Michael G. Sargent, "The Annihilation of Marguerite Porete," *Viator* 28 (1997): 253–79.

39. Others include the Franciscan preachers David of Augsburg (1200–1272), Berthold of Regensburg (ca. 1210–1272), and the chaplain of the Dominican convent of Engelthal, Friedrich Sunder (1254–1328), who is the subject of a life (like Beatrice's).

40. The obvious counterpart to the three German Dominicans is Richard Rolle. Other well-known, but anonymous vernacular texts that come to mind are the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*, a guide for women living the life of an anchoress, and the fourteenth-century *Cloud of Unknowing*, a guide for contemplatives pursuing the advanced stages of mystical union. See also the selections in Wogan-Browne et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular*.

41. Eckhart himself refers to these copyists in his "Defense," written in response to accusations of heresy. See Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and Bernard McGinn, ed. Richard J. Payne (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 74. For Eckhart's works see Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, ed. Josef Quint and Josef Koch respectively (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1936–). The German works are edited by Josef Quint, the Latin by Josef Koch. For English translations and helpful introductions to the material, see Eckhart, *The Essential Eckhart* and Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart Teacher and Preacher*, trans. Bernard McGinn with the collaboration of Frank Tobin and Elvira Borgstadt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

42. Clark, "Holy Woman or Unworthy Vessel?" 38.

43. In the papal bull condemning Eckhart's writings, Pope John XXII explains that the articles were condemned and the bull published "so that the hearts of the simple, who are easily seduced, and especially those who heard the said Eckhart preach the said articles while he lived, not be stained by the errors contained in them." Robert E. Lerner, "New Evidence for the Condemnation of Meister Eckhart," *Speculum* 72 (1997): 357. For the complete text of the bull, see Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, 77–81.

44. Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften im Auftrag der Württembergischen Kommission für Landesgeschichte*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1907; reprint Frankfurt: Minerva, 1961), 4–6. Henry Suso, *The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 58–59.

45. Frank Tobin, "Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel: Was the *Vita* a Cooperative Effort?," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 118–35.

46. See, for example, Hans Neumann, "Mechthild von Magdeburg und die mittelniederländische Frauenmystik," in *Medieval German Studies Presented to Frederick Norman* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1965), 231–46. John Margetts argues that, in light of the deep familiarity with the Latin tradition displayed in the text, Mechthild's lament alludes not merely to her linguistic skills, but rather to the larger tension faced by both male and female mystics between human language and the experience of divine language. John Margetts, "Latein und Volkssprache bei Mechthild von Magdeburg," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 12 (1977): 136. Köbele, testing Margetts' assumption with closer attention to Mechthild's text, sees Mechthild's claim not to know Latin as a humility topos functioning within the larger tension Margetts describes. Köbele, *Bilder der*

unbegriffenen Wahrheit, 34: “‘Einfalt’ in Verbindung mit Gottinspiration ist ein Schlüsselbegriff, mit dem Mechthild durchgängig ihr eigenes literarisches Vorgehen charakterisiert” (“Simplicity” in connection with divine inspiration is a key concept with which Mechthild characterizes her literary activity throughout the book).

47. Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: dtv, 1986), 470–72. In a more recent publication, Bumke adds writing to the skills women generally mastered. Joachim Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: dtv, 1990), 38. D. H. Green has qualified this generalization, albeit in the context of the orality/literacy debates. Reassessing the evidence of both a listening and reading reception in courtly literature, he argues that some men—specifically, knights and rulers—could also read. See D. H. Green, “Orality and Reading: The State of Research in Medieval Studies,” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 275. See also idem., *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature, 800–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

48. Ehrenschtendtner, “*Puellae litteratae*,” 54–55. A notable exception to this generalization would be Hadewijch, whose writings reflect a thorough knowledge of Latin Scripture as well as familiarity with several monastic writers. See Neumann, “Mechthild von Magdeburg und die mittelniederländische Frauenmystik,” 233–34.

49. Ehrenschtendtner, “*Puellae litteratae*,” 56.

50. See Jo-Ann McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, “Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom,” in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 95–124; and James A. Brundage, *Sex, Law, and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, Great Britain: Variorum, 1993).

51. De Ganck, *Life of Beatrice*, xv n. 11.

52. For Yolanda’s story, see the introduction to Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 3–4; Johannes Meier, ed., *Bruder Hermann: Leben der Gräfin Iolande von Vianden mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen* (Breslau: W. Koebner, 1889); and Brother Hermann, *Brother Hermann’s Life of the Countess Yolanda of Vianden*, trans. Richard H. Lawson (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995).

53. De Ganck, *Life of Beatrice*, xiv. We can only speculate what Beatrice’s time with the beguines had to do with this choice—did she choose to enter an order because the devout religiosity of the beguines inspired her to do so, or did she choose the order because the beguines were not devout enough?

54. For more examples of choices of religious paths early in life, see Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 87–88, and Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, 84–85.

55. Köbele makes this point in Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit*, 82–83.

56. Ibid., 83.

57. Ibid., 84–85.

58. The precise nature of the relationship between religious women and their spiritual supervisors, as well as the role of this relationship in the genesis and production of mystical literature is a topic on which much work has recently appeared. See, for example, U. Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 101–76; Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster*, 57–157; and the essays in Catherine M. Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

59. Robert Peters, “Soziokulturelle Voraussetzungen und Sprachraum des Mittelniederdeutschen,” in *Sprachgeschichte: Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*, ed. Werner Besch et al., vol. 2, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), 1211. See also, Karl Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Überlieferung und Sprach- und Siedlungsgeschichte im Ostniederdeutschen* (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1966). On Magdeburg, see Robert Holtzman, “Otto der Große und Magdeburg,” in *Aufsätze zur deutschen Geschichte im Mittelalterraum*, ed. Albrecht Timm (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 1–33; and Henry Mayr-Harting, “The Church of Magdeburg: Its Trade and Its Town in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries,” in *Church and City 1000–1500 Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke*, ed. David Abulafia, Michael Franklin, and Miri Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 129–50.

60. Freed, *The Friars and German Society*, 56.

61. For a study of Dominican attitudes about the vernacular and its role in preaching, see Claire M. Waters, “Talking the Talk: Access to the Vernacular in Medieval Preaching,” in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Post-Medieval Vernacularity*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 31–42.

62. The term standard should be understood loosely here, as the manuscript witnesses to courtly literature display regional dialect variations. For the purposes of critical editions, scholars in the nineteenth century agreed on a standard form of Middle High German that continues to be taught today, but which is really a composite of the characteristics found in the major High German literary texts of the period.

63. According to Willy Sanders, “Die sprachlich-literarische Ausstrahlung, die sich umgekehrt als Abhängigkeit äußert, war damals eindeutig von Süd nach Nord gerichtet” (The direction of linguistic and literary influence at that time, which when reversed appears as dependence, was unequivocally from South to North). Willy Sanders, *Sachsensprache, Hanesprache, Plattdeutsch: Sprachgeschichtliche Grundzüge des Niederdeutschen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 124.

64. Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 26; See also Sanders, *Sachsensprache, Hanesprache, Plattdeutsch*, 123–24; and R. Peters, “Soziokulturelle Voraussetzungen und Sprachraum,” 1214–16.

65. For a summary of this debate that supports the latter camp, see Ludwig Wolff, “Überlegungen zur sprachlichen Gestalt der *Eneide* Heinrichs von Veldeke,” in *Dialog: Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft im Zeichen deutschfranzösischer Begegnung; Festgabe für Josef Kunz*, ed. Rainer Schönhaar (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1973), 11–21.

66. R. Peters, “Soziokulturelle Voraussetzungen und Sprachraum,” 1216. As the editor of the only edition notes, Brun’s particular version of High German mixes both High and Low German forms. Brun von Schonebeck, *Das hohe Lied* (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein, 1893), xxiv.

67. The famous *Sachsenspiegel* (*Spegel der Sassen*) (1221–1224), which records the laws of the region at the request of a feudal lord, Count Hoyer of Falkenstein, marks the beginning of the Middle Low German literary, primarily prose tradition. Composed initially in Latin, it was translated into Low German (according to the prologue) at the prompting of the patron. Sanders, *Sachsensprache, Hanesprache, Plattdeutsch*, 133. Interestingly, the prologue is composed in Middle High German verse. R. Peters, “Soziokulturelle Voraussetzungen und Sprachraum,” 1216. For other examples, see Agathe Lasch, *Aus alten niederdeutschen Stadtbüchern: Ein mittelniederdeutsches Lesebuch*, 2nd ed., ed. Dieter Möhn and Robert Peters (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1987); and Gustav Korlén, *Die mittelniederdeutschen Texte des 13. Jahrhunderts: Beiträge zur Quellenkunde und Grammatik des Frühmittelniederdeutschen* (Lund: Gleerup, 1945).

68. Agathe Lasch, *Mittelniederdeutsche Grammatik*, 2nd ed. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1974), 8. See also R. Peters, “Soziokulturelle Voraussetzungen und Sprachraum,” 1214; Sanders, *Sachsensprache, Hanesprache, Plattdeutsch*, 126–71; and Horst Wernicke, “Literarische Rezeptionsbedingungen im Hanseraum aus historischer Sicht,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters im europäischen Kontext*, ed. Rolf Bräuer (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1998), 135–47.

69. Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes*, 4.

70. Quoted in Sanders, *Sachsensprache, Hanesprache, Plattdeutsch*, 133.

71. “So gruessed er si mit der hovesprache, die man in dirre kuchin nüt vernimet, und kleidet sú mit den kleidern, die man ze dem palaste tragen sol, und git sich in ir gewalt” (I, 2: 9–11).

72. “Owe crone der heligen cristanheit, wie sere bistu geselwet! Din edelsteine sint dir entvallen, wan du krenkest und schendest den heligen cristanen geloven” (VI, 21: 3–5).

73. I offer a further contextualization and analysis of these critiques in the second part of this chapter.

74. The Middle High German text uses the word *techan* and the Latin text contains the heading *De decano magdeburgensi*. Frank Tobin translates *techan* as “deacon,” but *decanus* is more correctly rendered as “dean,” as are both the medieval *techan* and modern German *Dekan*. I am grateful to Barbara Newman for alerting me to this distinction.

75. Readers might also think of Julian of Norwich and her milieu in this regard. As Nicholas Watson has argued, by the time Julian offers the universality of forgiveness to her readers in the fourteenth century, there is a certain universality coming to be attributed to vernacular language itself. Nicholas Watson, “Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27. 2 (1997): 146. Mechthild’s text appears to be one of the first (if not the first) to manifest such a claim.

76. Nicole Bériou, “The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 137. See also, Alcuin Blamires, “Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saints’ Lives,” *Viator* 26 (1995): 135–52.

77. One of the best accounts of this conflict is still Rolf Köhn, “Monastisches Bildungsideal und weltgeistliches Wissenschaftsdenken: Zur Vorgeschichte des Mendikantenstreites an der Universität

Paris,” in *Die Auseinandersetzungen an der Pariser Universität im XIII. Jahrhundert*, ed. Albert Zimmermann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976), 1–37. See also D. L. d’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Alistair J. Minnis, “Chaucer’s Pardoner and the ‘Office of Preacher,’” in *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), 89–100.

78. McDonnell notes an instance where a Dominican prior is urged to provide sermons at the time of communion for a group of nuns; these sermons were to be given on vigils rather than saints’ days so that people would not be attracted away from parish churches to hear the prior. McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, 199.

79. Blamires, “Women and Preaching,” 142.

80. Because the biblical prohibition specifies teaching as forbidden to women, debates concerning women’s preaching usually use the more inclusive term, *docere*. Blamires, “Women and Preaching,” 139.

81. In her current work, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton points to the remarkable frequency with which these “openings” for women’s preaching seemed to occur: “When Women Preached: The Impact of Female Prophets in the Later Middle Ages and Langland’s Earliest Audience,” unpublished lecture, part of a chapter from her work in progress *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Revelatory Theology in Late Medieval England*. I am grateful to Professor Kerby-Fulton for sharing this work with me.

82. Blamires, “Women and Preaching,” 140.

83. *Ibid.*, 141.

84. *Ibid.*, 142; Bériou, “The Right of Women,” 138–39.

85. Bériou, “The Right of Women,” 140–41.

86. Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, 40–41.

87. Bériou, “The Right of Women,” 137.

88. See especially Book II, 4 in which St. Catherine and also St. Cecilia are among a group of virgins in the choir of a church where the protagonist of the vision, “the poor maid” (*die arme dirne*), receives communion. The women’s function in the vision is to help the maid accept her legitimacy and worthiness to be among them. For a detailed reading of this vision, see Chapter 2 in this book.

89. I am again taking issue with Ursula Peters here. Commenting on the same passage from Mechthild, she writes: “[d]er Beichtvater ist hier nicht mehr als eine schematische Rollenfigur, die keine kulturhistorische Kommentierung des Schreibbefehls im Sinne eines literarischen Zusammenwirkens von Mechthild mit ihrem Seelsorger erlaubt” (the confessor is here nothing more than a role or figure that hence does not allow us to draw cultural-historical conclusions about the command to write in the sense of a literary collaboration between Mechthild and her spiritual guide). U. Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 118. As Frank Tobin points out, Peters complains about the *myth of a close collaboration* (of a close collaboration), but Tobin finds nothing in his review of the scholarship that supposedly propagates this myth. Tobin, *Mechthild of Magdeburg*, 131.

90. Responding to this objection in his *Book of Divine Consolation*, Eckhart writes: “But to this I say that if we are not to teach people who have not been taught (*ungelêrete liute*), no one will ever be taught, and no one will ever be able to teach or write. For that is why we teach the untaught, so that they may be changed from uninstructed into instructed.” Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, 239. For a study of the relationship between Mechthild’s theology and Eckhart’s, see Ruh, *Meister Eckhart*, and more recently, Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

91. The term *kenosis* and its history are discussed explicitly by Nicholas Watson who relates it to the rise of vernacular literature in late medieval England (1370–1420). Watson, “Conceptions of the Word,” 86–91. For a similar claim in the German context, see Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit*, 32–51. While Köbele explores the ways in which the vernacular is particularly qualified to be the language of the new mysticism emerging in Germany and France in the thirteenth century (focused on and authorized by the *unio mystica* and opposed to the learned tradition), Watson analyzes the ways in which language politics and theology (specifically the doctrine of incarnation) became coterminous.

92. Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit*, 35–36; Watson, “Conceptions of the Word,” 123.

93. For Mechthild’s worries, see, for example, II, 26: 2–3 and III, 1: 36–38. Mechthild also frequently mentions persecution by enemies, as in V, 17: 3–4: “Als mich min viende jagent, so flühe ich in den arm din ...” (When my enemies hunt me, I flee into your arms).

94. Wilson, ed., *Medieval Women Writers*, viii.

95. See Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change.”

96. On dissent, see Rita Copeland, ed., *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), who writes: “dissent

is 'summoned' or 'hailed' through what is necessarily an oppositional recognition, the juridical reprimand that compels dissent into its subjected and thus knowable status, naming it as heterodoxy, heresy, or sedition" (4).

97. Mechthild's situation as described and analyzed below thus answers Copeland's call to restore "an elasticity to our understanding of dissent in history." Copeland, *Criticism and Dissent*, 4.

98. The first to praise Mechthild's book for its literary qualities was Carl Greith, *Die deutsche Mystik im Prediger-Orden (von 1250–1350) nach ihren Grundlagen, Liedern und Lebensbildern aus handschriftlichen Quellen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1861/1965). See also the literature quoted above in note 3.

99. This has repeatedly been my experience in teaching *The Flowing Light* to undergraduates.

100. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Dissent and Order in the Middle Ages: The Search for Legitimate Authority* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 24.

101. Quoted in Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau*, 8.

102. Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Consideration," in *Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 145–72.

103. Wolfgang Beinert, *Die Kirche-Gottes Heil in der Welt: Die Lehre von der Kirche nach den Schriften des Rupert von Deutz, Honorius Augustodunensis und Gerhoch von Reichersberg; Ein Beitrag zur Ekklesiologie des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973), 398.

104. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 67.

105. *Ibid.*, 286.

106. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau*, 23.

107. Nor does this tradition end with Mechthild—note Margery Kempe's parable about the bear (the corrupt priest) eating and then voiding the flowers from a fruit tree (priestly virtues) and the positive reaction it gleaned from the clerics and archbishop who were questioning her. Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 126–28. Yet Margery successfully defends herself from frequent charges of Lollardy (a reform movement deemed heretical in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England). Margery was also both a dissenter from and a defender of the Catholic orthodoxy, but under very different circumstances.

108. See also IV, 22:1–2: *Von vier hande crone bruoder Heinriches und von der wirdekeit Sant Dominicus* (On the four kinds of crowns of friar Henry and on the worthiness of St. Dominic); V, 24: 1–2: *Von sehsleie kinden únsers herren gottes und von tugenden Sant Dominicus und wie got sinen orden geeret hat an vier dingen* (On six kinds of children of our lord God and on the virtues of St. Dominic and how God honored his order with four things); and V, 34: 1–2: *Von fünfleie núwen heligen, dur boese lúte gesant, und wie got wil weschen die cristanheit in sin selbes bluote hie nach* (On five kinds of new saints, sent because of evil people, and how God will wash Christianity in his own blood hereafter).

109. "an lobelichem sange, mit warer predeunge, mit rehter losunge, mit minnenklicher troestunge, mit fründlicher helfe, mit heligem bilde; und ovch sint si ein heilsam bant des heligen cristan gelovben" (IV, 21: 8–11).

110. Ir fuesse sint gezieret mit manigerleie túrem gesteine also schone, das ich mich werlich vrowete, wurde mir so erlich ein crone. Das haben si wider ir arbeit, die hie an ir fuesse ist geleit (III, 1: 89–92; Their feet are so beautifully adorned with many kinds of precious stones that I would be truly pleased to have such an honorable crown. This they have because of the toil that is required in this world of their feet).

111. "... Do vragete ich: 'Eya lieber herre, sol der orden stan untz an das ende der welte?' Do sprach únsere herre: 'Ja, si soellent wesen untz an das ende der welte'" (IV, 27: 6–8; Then I asked: "Ah dear Lord, shall the order last until the end of the world?" Then our Lord said: "Yes, they shall exist until the end of the world").

112. Elisabeth died in 1231 and was canonized in 1234.

113. "Sant Dominicum sante ich den ungelovbigen ze botten und den tumben ze lere und den betrubeten ze troste. Ich sante ovch Sante Franciscum ze botten den girigen pfaffen und homuetigen leien. Mere Sante Peter, der ist min botte des blutes, da nu die valsche cristanheit so jemerlich inne bevangen stat" (V, 34:11–15; I sent St. Dominic as a messenger to the unbelievers and to teach the foolish and to console the troubled. I also sent St. Francis as a messenger to the greedy priests and arrogant laity. Further, I sent St. Peter, the new martyr, who is my messenger of blood, in which false Christianity stands so lamentably imprisoned).

114. "Dis sprach ovch únsere herre: 'Dis buoch sende ich nu ze botten allen geistlichen lúten, bedú boesen und den guten . . .' ("(V, 34: 41–42; Our Lord also said this: "I send this book now as a messenger to all religious people, both the evil and the good"). This passage is excerpted and used as a

prologue to the book. See above, note 14.

115. "Dominicus, min sun, hatte in ertliche vier ding an im, die solten alle prior an in haben" (IV, 20: 5–6; Dominic, my son, had four things when he was on earth, all priors should have these things).

116. Marianne Heimbach, "Der ungelehrte Mund" als Autorität: *Mystische Erfahrung als Quelle kirchlich-prophetischer Rede im Werk Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1989), 136.

117. The graphic representation of the bodily torture of bad priests in V, 14 is consistent with Mechthild's understanding of the mechanics of hell generally. Effecting a direct correlation between sin and torment, the greedy or gluttonous are eaten, the unbelievers are made to worship Lucifer and dispute with him, the unchaste are made to fornicate continuously either with their former partners in life or with other devils, and so on. See Mechthild's elaborate and fantastic vision of hell (III, 21). On this vision, see Petrus Tax, "Die grosse Himmelsschau Mechthilds von Magdeburg und ihre Höllenvision: Aspekte des Erfahrungshorizontes, der Gegenbildlichkeit und Parodierung," *Zfda* 108 (1979): 112–37. Matching a punishment in hell or purgatory to a particular sin was relatively common in dream visions of journeys to hell. Two of the more widely circulated of such visions (in addition to Tundale's vision cited below) were the *Vision of St. Paul*, a text that dates from the fourth century, but which was translated into almost every European language, including German, during the Middle Ages, and the legends that arose around the story of *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, composed in Latin and in a number of vernaculars, and referred to by many well-known medieval authors such as Matthew Paris, Jacobus de Voragine, Caesarius of Heisterbach, Vincent of Beauvais, and Etienne de Bourbon. See Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland, 1993), 179–80 and 151–54 respectively. Although as Barbara Newman notes, women mystics frequently include visions of purgatory among many other types in their revelations, some female authors translate more traditional journeys to the other world or record revelations solely having to do with visions of purgatory. See Marie de France, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Poem*, trans. Michael Curley (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993) and Marta Powell Harley, *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown, Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary: Introduction, Critical Text, and Translation* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1985).

118. The graphic and physical descriptions of hellish experience comes into the tradition through the Voyage of St. Brendan (a tenth-century narrative based on an eighth-century legend of an Irishman who supposedly lived from 486–577/83), which is written not as a dream vision, but as the actual voyages of the saint. The vividness of the voyager's experiences, however, was adapted into the hell-vision tradition. The Voyage of St. Brendan is another of the most widely circulated and translated tales of this kind. Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell*, 51–52. A twelfth-century adaptation in Middle High German verse was transmitted widely in the southern German-speaking regions. It was also translated into a Middle German dialect in the thirteenth century and into Low German somewhat later. Carl Selmer, "The Vernacular Translations of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*: A Bibliographical Study," *Medieval Studies* 18 (1956): 145–47. See also Torsten Dahlberg, *Brandiana: Kritische Bemerkungen zu den Untersuchungen über die deutschen und niederländischen Brandan-Versionen der sogenannten Reise-Klasse; Mit Komplettierendem Material und einer Neuausgabe des ostfölschen Gedichtes* (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1958).

119. For an account of the propensity especially women mystics have for interceding on behalf of souls suffering in purgatory, see Barbara Newman, "On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women," in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, ed. Barbara Newman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 108–36.

120. Katharina Bochsler, "Ich han da inne ungehoertú ding gesehen": *Die Jenseitsvisionen Mechthilds von Magdeburg in der Tradition der mittelalterlichen Visionsliteratur* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 108–9; see also Helena Stadler, "Topographie des Jenseits: Die Allgegenwart der mystischen Seele," *Paragrana* 7.2 (1998): 81–106; for an overview, see Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell* (gives short synopses and bibliography); idem, *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989), an anthology of the major primary texts of the tradition; and the much debated Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

121.

dar nâch vile schier
funden sî aber ein tier,
daz was harte eislich
den sêlen was ez schedelîch . . . (995–98)

ez saz ûf eime gefforme sê.
 sin vuore was klegelich
 und vil unvertregelich.
 nû muget ir hoeren wunder grôz:
 die sêle ez swalh unde nôz,
 in sînem bûche ez sî behielt,
 unz sich ir deheiniu niht verwielt.
 es gebar sî ûf dem îse . . . (1016–23).

very soon thereafter they found an animal that was terribly grim and was damaging to souls. It sat on a frozen lake ... Its way [of behaving] was lamentable and unbearable. Now may you hear of a great wonder: it swallowed and enjoyed the soul, held it in its stomach until no other had any power over it. It then gave birth to it on the ice.

Albrecht Wagner, ed., *Visio Thugdali Lateinisch und Altdcutsch* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1989), 150–51. See also Dieter Kartschoke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich: dtv, 1990), 315–18. For information on the manuscript transmission of the Latin and vernacular *Visio*, see Nigel F. Palmer, *Visio Thugdali: The German and Dutch Translations and Their Circulation in the Later Middle Ages* (Munich: Artemis, 1982).

122. Bochsler, *Die Jenseitsvisionen Mechthilds von Magdeburg*, 108. That the idea of sinners as devil's food was commonplace already in the twelfth century is suggested by a letter to Hildegard of Bingen from Odo of Soissons, later Odo of Paris, who in the greeting calls himself "a broken reed, the embodiment of evil, food for the devil" (my emphasis). The relevant Latin is *calamus confractus, forma mali, esca diaboli*. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), vol. 1, 108 and 209. I am grateful to Claire Waters for this reference.

123. See Elizabeth A. Andersen, "Mechthild von Magdeburg, der Dominikanerorden und der Weltklerus," in *Spannungen und Konflikte menschlichen Zusammenlebens in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. *Bristoler Kolloquium 1993*, ed. Kurt Gartner, Ingrid Kasten, and Frank Shaw (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), 269–72; see also Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster*, 61–62 regarding the related problem of the *cura monialium* of the beguines.

124. D. L. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars*, especially chapter 1.

125. Andersen, "Mechthild von Magdeburg," 269.

126. David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 183–84.

127. After much debate, a compromise was reached in 1311 in which the friars were free to preach in their own churches and in public, but were forbidden to appear in parish pulpits without invitation. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 1, 186.

128. Hans Neumann, "Beiträge zur Textgeschichte des *Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit* und zur Lebensgeschichte Mechthilds von Magdeburg," in *Altdcutsche und altniederländische Mystik*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 182.

129. Rolf Köhn, "Monastisches Bildungsideal," 1–2.

130. In the margin of the Latin version of this chapter, there is a note to "Gulielmi a Sancto Amore etc. In Universitate Parisiensi." Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg*, 138 n. 89.

131. Andersen, "Mechthild von Magdeburg," 270. In the Einsiedeln manuscript, next to the title of IV, 27 is written "Anno dominini M°CC°LVI (1256), the year of Alexander's bull. Neumann, "Beiträge," 207–8.

132. Heimbach, "Der ungelehrte Mund," 158: "die Wiederherstellung der persönlichen Integrität der Geistlichen durch innere Umkehr, um Übereinstimmung zwischen Lebensführung, geistlichem Auftrag und Amtsgewalt des Priesters."

133. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, apparatus to VI, 21: 1 in vol. 1, 231; see also note to this line in vol. 2, 125.

134. A letter from Heinrich of Nördlingen to a nun in his spiritual care (Margaret Ebner) warmly recommends *The Flowing Light* to her and advises: If she or the other sisters have any trouble understanding it, "die zeichend und schribentz mir, so betützsch ichs euch, wan es ward uns gar in fremdem tützsch gelichen, das wir wol zwai jar flisz und arbeit hetint, ee wirs ain wenig in unser tützsch brachtint" (indicate and write them to me, and I will Germanize them for you, for it came to us in such an unfamiliar German that we had two years of hard work and toil before we brought it a little bit into our German). Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur*

Geschichte der deutschen Mystik (Amsterdam: P. Shippers N.V., 1882/1966), 246–47. In using these letters as the basis for my argument here, I again disagree with Ursula Peters, who questions the letters' value as historical evidence. She argues that they are, like the writings of Mechthild and other women mystics, primarily literary documents following literary conventions about the role of the confessor in relation to his spiritual daughters and as such do not reveal any information about Heinrich of Nördlingen or his relationship to Margaret Ebner. See U. Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 149–55. Whether or not the letters were understood and used in the sixteenth century as Peters suggests — that is, as models for an ideal type of spiritual relationship—does not, in my view, lessen the potential insight into Mechthild's book supplied by Heinrich's comments on the translation project. It is difficult to imagine how or why a sixteenth-century scribe would invent such details.

135. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen*, 246.

136. Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 4.

137. Jeanette Beer, "Introduction," in *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 4. In addition to the authority of the source, medieval translators also considered the text's function and the target audience when deciding on the form and equivalency of the translation. For the Latin translators of Mechthild's book, the learned audience with scholastic expectations carried more weight than the divine source—hence they had no qualms about reordering the chapters according to topic. Heinrich's target audience, however—the nuns of Medingen and other "friends of God"—were mostly religious women like Mechthild for whom her book would have been read as a record of an exemplary contemplative life.

138. Jeanette Beer and Kenneth Lloyd-Jones, eds., "Introduction," in *Translation and the Transmission of Culture Between 1300 and 1600* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ix.

139. "in praiseworthy song, with sincere preaching, with correct remission [in confession], with loving consolation, with friendly aid, and with a holy example." This is a prose passage, but I set it out in verse here to aid the reader in following the literary analysis.

140. "to the unholy women sitting in castles so permeated with lust, so covered in arrogance and so ensconced in vanity that they rightly should have gone into the abyss."

141. Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell*, 37–38. Other graphic accounts of the fate of priests in the afterlife can be found in the visions of Tundale, Wetti, the Monk of Evesham, and Thurkill.

142. In the purgatory shown to Hildegard of Bingen, evil spirits torment those "who had turned their human nature, both male and female, into something contrary through fornication" by pouring fiery water over them and harassing them with fiery pitchforks. Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of the Rewards of Life (Liber Vitae Meritorum)*, trans. Bruce W. Hozeski (New York: Garland, 1994), 164 (part 3, chapter 70).

143. As Caroline Walker Bynum has argued, "preachers, hagiographers, and schoolmen saw nothing fundamentally inconsistent in depicting the bodily tortures of disembodied spirits although they sometimes admitted it was odd." Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 281. This tradition has its logical end point in Dante.

144. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 1.

145. Frank Tobin, "Mechthild von Magdeburg, the Devil, and Antichrist," in *The Mystical Gesture: Essays on Medieval and Early Modern Spiritual Culture in Honor of Mary E. Giles*, ed. Robert Boenig (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 19.

Chapter 2

1. Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000). For a concise summary of the different approaches to Mechthild's authorship in the criticism, see Marcus Beling, "Der Körper als Pergament der Seele: Gedächtnis, Schrift und Körperlichkeit bei Mechthild von Magdeburg und Heinrich Seuse," in *Körper mit Geschichte: Der menschliche Körper als Ort der Selbst- und Weltdeutung*, ed. Clemens Wischermann and Stefan Haas (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), 100–12.

2. Christiane Nisters, "Der gepineget licham: Zur Bedeutung des 'Autorinnenkörpers' für die

Wahrheitslegitimation des Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit," in *Literalität und Körperlichkeit Littéralité et Corporalité*, ed. Günter Krause (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1997), 21–46. Unlike Lynn Staley's work on Margery Kempe, however, Nisters does not posit an author outside of the text who is responsible for this literary construct along the lines of a more canonically secure author like, say, Chaucer. Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

3. Beling, "Der Körper als Pergament der Seele," 112.

4. For example, see Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 36; Sarah Beckwith, "Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Language, Agency, and Authority in the Book of Margery Kempe," *Exemplaria* 4.1 (1992): 180; Maureen Quigilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), esp. 34–41.

5. Paul writes to Timothy: "Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2: 11–12). Women who wrote in spite of this ban were only rarely approved by papal and clerical authorities. The abbess Hildegard of Bingen, with the aid of Bernard of Clairvaux, received papal endorsement of her writing in 1148. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 9. By contrast, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, the mystical treatise by French beguine, Marguerite Porete, was condemned and burned, as was Marguerite herself in 1310. Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

6. In response, as Frank Tobin notes, a Dominican synod in 1261 issued decrees that were severely critical of beguines. Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995), 2.

7. In the thirteenth century, papal authorities assigned the responsibility for this care to the mendicant friars. See Chapter 1 of this book for a discussion of Mechthild's relationship to the Dominicans. See also Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan with an introduction by Robert E. Lerner (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 143; and John B. Freed, "Urban Development and the 'Cura Monialium' in Thirteenth Century Germany," *Viator* 3 (1972): 311–27.

8. Gisela Vollmann-Profe has recently argued that the passages in which Mechthild both implicitly and explicitly discusses her authorship of the text become more frequent and direct in Books II through VI. Mechthild's active participation in the writing process as an author, argues Vollmann-Profe, thus becomes increasingly more pronounced as the work progresses. Gisela Vollmann-Profe, "Mechthild—auch 'in Werktagskleidern': Zu berühmten und weniger berühmten Abschnitten des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*," *ZfdPh* 113, Special Issue (1994): 155. See also Sara Suzanne Poor, "Medieval Incarnation(s) of Self: Subjectivity and Authority in the Writings of Mechthild von Magdeburg" (Dissertation, Duke University, 1994).

9. Ingrid Kasten, "Körperlichkeit und Performanz in der Frauenmystik," *Paragrana* 7.1 (1998): 101–4.

10. "... den jenen, den ich minnen, den han ich gesehen ... in miner sele stan" (II, 1: 4–7; the one whom I love I have seen standing in my soul).

11. On the idea of mystic writers' "responses" to gender ideologies, but following a different trajectory, see Nicholas Watson, "If women be double naturally. Remaking 'Woman' in Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love," *Exemplaria* 8.1 (1996): 1–34.

12. Pride was considered a much greater sin for women than for men. As the author of the *Speculum virginum* argues, while vainglory is already bad in men, who do have something to brag about, "an arrogant woman is like a monster, for there is nothing more fragile than her sex." Quoted in Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," *Traditio* 45 (1989/90): 116.

13. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 36. Even Hildegard, an abbess with an obviously learned background, did not write commentaries on scriptural texts. Her theological writings are all framed as visions that are explicated by God himself. We can also think of Marguerite Porete or Meister Eckhart here. As Hollywood points out, neither of them used visions to authorize their writings, and both of them were tried and condemned by the Inquisition. Marguerite was burned at the stake. Eckhart's

position as a master within the Preacher's Order meant that he himself was not threatened with death (201–2).

14. On this subject, see especially Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, & Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

15. Peter Abelard even recommends deference on the part of abbots to the “brides of the Lord,” the “mistresses” the abbots serve. Newman, “Flaws in the Golden Bowl,” 120–22.

16. Unlike the later mystics. Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart mentioned above, or Margery Kempe, whose book reports of open accusations of Lollardy made against her.

17. John B. Freed, *The Friars and German Society in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1977). See also Chapter 1.

18. Sarah Beckwith, “Problems of Authority,” 180.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Readers might think here of Paul's heavenly visions, particularly 2 Cor 12, where Paul speaks of himself as a man caught up in the third heaven and then reports what happens to him there in the first person. Vollmann-Profe, “Mechthild—auch ‘in Werktagskleidern,’” 150 n. 7. The conflict between the authority of the vision and feelings of humility is also an issue for Paul. Mechthild's visions of heaven clearly allude to Paul's, and a scribe transmitting her writings in a later compilation confirms these allusions by adding citations to Pauline visions in Latin. See Chapter 3.

21. It is unclear what this illness is. In addition to infections or viruses, menstruation may also have prevented women from attending mass. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 149. See also Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 3–4.

22. Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (1876), 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992), vol. 2, 1559.

23. *Wie nütze das si, das ein mensche von guotem willen sie. . .* (II, 4: 4; How useful it is that a person be of good will . . .).

24. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 75–86.

25. *Ibid.*, 76 and 250 n. 104, citing VII, 65: 19–21 (the last chapter of *The Flowing Light*) where the soul says to the body: “Eya min allerliebste gevegnisse, da ich inne gebunden bin, ich danken dir alles, des du hast gevolget mir; alleine ich dike betruet bin von dir, so bistu doch mir ze helfe komen; dir wirt noch alle din not benomen an dem jungsten tage” (Ah, my dearest prison in which I am bound, I thank you for everything in which you have followed [obeyed] me; even though I am often troubled by you, you have come to my aid all the same; all of your distress will be taken from you on judgment day).

26. Much attention has been paid to the concept of body in recent scholarship on medieval literature generally. Most if not all of these studies are indebted to Caroline Walker Bynum's groundbreaking work. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); *idem*, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); *idem*, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992); and *idem*, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Some of the major and field-defining essay collections on this topic in English include Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, eds., *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Ulrike Wiethaus, ed., *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993); and Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1994). For work in German on this issue, see Ingrid Bennewitz and Ingrid Kasten, eds., *Genderdiskurse und Körperbilder im Mittelalter: Eine Bilanzierung nach Butler und Laqueur* (Münster: LIT, 2002); and for collections not limited to the field of Medieval Studies, see, for example, Günter Krause, ed., *Literalität und Körperlichkeit Littéralité et Corporalité* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1997); and Clemens Wischermann and Stefan Haas, eds., *Körper mit Geschichte: Der menschliche Körper als Ort der Selbst- und Weltdeutung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000).

Interest in the body has also made its way into Mechthild scholarship. Bynum's chapter on Mechthild and the nuns of Helfta in *Jesus as Mother*, 170–262, has led the way in this field, followed by *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. Amy Hollywood presents an analysis of Mechthild's views of the body that expands and qualifies the project begun by Bynum. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 75–86. Modifying Bynum's theses are Ulrike Wiethaus, “Sexuality, Gender, and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from Germany and the Netherlands,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (1991): 35–52 and, from the perspective of German scholarship on women mystics, and Susanne Bürkle, “Weibliche Spiritualität und imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Deutungsmuster und -

perspektiven frauenmystischer Literatur im Blick auf die Thesen Caroline Walker Bynums,” *ZfPh* 113, Special Issue (1994): 116–43. See also Beling “Der Körper als Pergament der Seele”; Kasten, “Körperlichkeit und Performanz”; Nisters, “Der *gepineget licham*” and Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, “*wan got geschuof inen nie schemeliche lide*: Zur Geschichte der Sexualität und Scham im Spiegel des *Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit* der Mechthild von Magdeburg,” in *Contemplata aliis tradere: Studien zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Spiritualität*, ed. Claudia Brinker et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 19–45. Only very recently has work on medieval medical views of bodies and sexual reproduction been considered in relation to Mechthild’s text: Helena Stadler, “Körper und Subjekt in der Frauenmystik,” in *Genderdiskurse und Körperbilder im Mittelalter*, ed. Bennewitz and Kasten, 233–54; and idem, “Die Sünderin Eva aus frauenmystischer Sicht: Zur Genesis-Auslegung Mechthilds von Magdeburg,” in *Schwierige Frauen, schwierige Manner in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Alois Haas and Ingrid Kasten (Bern: Lang, 1999), 201–20. Rejecting these approaches, a recent dissertation takes issue with readings of the body in Mechthild that are grounded in feminist and/or Foucauldian theory, arguing instead for a theological reading in which the body is found to be essential to the individual’s salvation through divine love. David O’Dell Neville, “The Chalice of the Flesh: The Soteriology of the Body in Mechthild von Magdeburg’s *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit*” (Dissertation, Washington University, 2002).

27. See Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988) and qualifying Jacquart and Thomasset’s claims, Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

28. Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 37–38.

29. Elizabeth Robertson, “Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich’s *Showings*,” in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 149.

30. The model for proper sex in medieval medical and philosophical writings is of course rigidly male/female and most discussions of mystical eroticism maintain the assumption that the relation between the female mystic and Christ is a heterosexual one. In a provocative article, however, Karma Lochrie asks the question that follows out of Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Jesus as Mother*, which is, “What does it signify when a female mystic desires and adores the feminized body of Christ?” See Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 186.

31. The impulse to generalize from one to all women mystics figures strongly in work such as Robertson’s. This is the main thrust of Wiethaus’s critique of Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. Wiethaus, “Sexuality, Gender and the Body.” My study of Mechthild’s case is an explicit attempt to resist this impulse.

32. Mechthild refers to this critique in Book VI. “Min pharisei sprach uf die rede, Johannes Baptista were ein leie” (VI, 36: 12; My pharisee responded to this speech saying that John the Baptist was a layman). She goes on to justify, in very strong terms, the appropriateness of St. John’s celebration of the mass, since he was one of the first people to recognize Christ in spirit and flesh. I will return to this response below.

33. The resistance of some of the monastic orders to the burdens of the *cura monialium*, given a notable increase in women’s participation in monastic and mendicant life, might have been motivated by fear of increased exposure to women (and their inherent lasciviousness). On the orders’ problems with the *cura*, see Freed, “Urban Development and the ‘Cura Monialium.’” “On the dangers to clerics of contact with women, see Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, esp. Chapter 2.

34. In contrast to convents, beguinages were generally inside city walls, like the houses of the mendicant friars who supervised their religious care. Because they did not enter orders, beguines were neither obligated nor forced to remain. However, they generally adopted monastic rules and followed them devoutly. Furthermore, they remained dependent on the clerical class (in the thirteenth century, predominantly the mendicant friars) for the sacraments. For the most recent work on medieval beguinages, focused primarily on the Low Countries, see Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

35. See Roberta Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 106–56.

36. In medieval churches, the tower was usually at the west end of the church over the entrance.

Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light*, 345 n 6. See also Hans Erich Kubach, *Deutsche Dome Des Mittelalters* (Königstein im Taunus: Hans Köster KG, 1984).

37. It was common for the semireligious to be considered in a hierarchical ordering determined according to marital status. Mechthild's ordering in this vision differs slightly from that of Jacques de Vitry, the confessor of another famous beguine, Marie d'Oignies (1177–1213), and the author of her *vita*. Jacques de Vitry divides the beguines of the Liège bishopric into three groups as well: in the most honored position are the virgins, who have abandoned the world to serve and follow Christ; second are the widows, who serve the holy bridegrooms with lasting prayer and good works; and third are the married women who receive honor for being able to lead angelic lives in the midst of temptation. Cited in Martina Wehrli Johns, "Haushälterin Gottes: Zur Mariennachfolge der Beginen," in *Maria Abbild oder Vorbild: Zur Sozialgeschichte mittelalterlicher Marienverehrung*, ed. Hedwig Röckelein, Claudia Opitz, and Dieter R. Bauer (Tübingen: edition diskord, 1990), 149. Mechthild is also not consistent in her depictions of this hierarchy. See, for example, her vision of heaven and its hierarchical structure: "Die luter geistlich megde sint, die soellent nach dem jungesten tage den bruch erfüllen obe Seraphin, da Lucifer und sin nehsten von verstossen sint" (III, 1: 57–59; Those who are pure spiritual virgins shall after the last judgment fill the breach above the Seraphim from where Lucifer and his closest companions were cast out). That is, pure virgins occupy the highest choir next to the Trinity and are situated above chaste widows, who may only watch and not participate in the mystical union.

38. For a contextualized reading of this purgatorial vision, see Chapter 1.

39. See also VII, 21: 7–10: "So wirf ich min antliz zuo der erden und klage und weine, eb ich mag, das der ewig unbegriffelicher got also guot ist, das er sich wil neigen in den unvletigen pfuol mines herzen" (So I cast my face to the earth and lament and weep, if I can, that eternal incomprehensible God is so kind as to lower himself into the foul puddle of my heart). This passage is part of a speech to the nuns at Helfta about how one should examine one's heart before going to communion. However, the image here refers not to the decay of the female body but to sins in the heart.

40. On this vision, see Helena Stadler, "Die Sünderin Eva;" and, more recently, Neville, "The Chalice of the Flesh," Chapter 2.

41. Keller, "*wan got geschuof inen nie schemeliche lide*," 26. When Mechthild discusses the eating of the forbidden fruit, she uses the third-person plural (*si assen*). She does not view Eve's transgression separate from Adam's. For a discussion of this *Gleichstellung der Geschlechter* (equality of the sexes) in Mechthild's vision, see Stadler, "Körper und Subjekt," 241–43.

42. My reading of Mechthild stands in contrast to readings of mystics' bodies that claim that "the mystic's *own body* becomes the site of contested discourses about the body—and about culture," [emphasis added]. Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," in *Maps of Flesh and Light. The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 38. Finke's argument takes Angela of Foligno's language about self-mortification and mutilation as a physical manifestation (writing on the body) of repressive ideologies about the female body. "The female mystic's only means of escaping her body," Finke writes, "was to indulge in an obsessive display and denouncing of its most 'grotesque' features" (38). As will become clear, the refiguring of the poor maid as a textual body in Mechthild's vision proves that this explanatory model does not hold for all women mystics.

43. The entire passage reads:

Do winkete ir ünser frowwe, das si oben Katherinen stuonde; do gieng si bi ünser lieben frowwen stan, wande es selten mohte geschehen, das si gottes muoter muoste sprechen und sehen: 'Eya du liebe wolgemuote' Das nam sú vúr guot, das dú unedele kra bi der edeln turteltuben stuont." (II, 4: 57–61)

Our Lady motioned to her that she should stand above Catherine. She went and stood next to our dear lady, for indeed it rarely occurred that she would have the chance to address and behold God's mother: "Oh, dear and noble Lady!" She considered it good that the lowly crow might stand next to the noble turtledove.

44. A phrase coined by Erik Peterson, "Theologie des Kleides," *Benediktinische Monatschrift* 16 (1934): 347–56.

45. Bardo Weiss, "Mechthild von Magdeburg und der frühe Meister Eckhart," *Theologie und Philosophie* 70 (1995): 18. See also Rom 13: 12 and 14: "The night is passed, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light [. . .] But put ye on the Lord

Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.”

46. Theological discussions of this robe of glory have their starting point in Gen 3: 21, in which God makes Adam and his wife “garments of skin” and clothes them. Sebastian Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, ed. Margot Schmidt and Carl Friedrich Geyer (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982), 14. While Brock’s essay focuses on the Syriac tradition of the fourth through seventh centuries, clothing imagery continues to be a favored motif in the writings of late medieval German mystics. Weiss, for example, lists numerous passages from Mechthild’s book as well as examples from Meister Eckhart’s works in which the imagery of clothing is used to describe the acquisition of religious virtues (18–19). Indeed, in Mechthild’s vision of creation, God creates Adam and Eve without *schemeliche lide* (shameful appendages) and gives them angelic clothes to wear (III, 9: 43–44). See also Keller, “*wan got geschuof inen nie schemeliche lide*,” 24.

47. For example: “So zühst si an ein hemede der sanften demuetekeit und also demuetic, das si under ir nit mag geliden; dar über ein wisses kleit der luterer küschekeit und also reine, das si an gedenken, an worten noch an beruerunge nüt me mag geliden, das si bevlecken moege” (I, 44: 18–21; Thus she put on a shirt of gentle humility and so humble that she could not bear anything under it; over that a white dress of pure chastity and so pure that she could no longer bear words or touching that might besmirch her).

48. The full text of the lyric is as follows:

Ich sturbe gerne von minne, / mochte es mir geschehen; / den jenen, den ich minnen, / den han ich gesehen / mit minen lichten ovgen / in miner sele stan. / Swelú brut iren lieben geherberget hat, / dú bedarf nit verre gan. / Dú minne mag nit wol vergan, / swa die juncfrowve dike nach dem jungelinge gat. / Sine edel nature die ist so bereit, / das er si aber gerne enpfat / und leit si im von herzen na. / Das mag den tumben lichte entgan, / die ungerne nach dem lieben stant. (II, 2: 2–16)

I would gladly die of love / would it happen to me; / That one whom I love / I have seen / with my shining eyes / standing in my soul. / Whichever bride has harbored her lover / she need not go far. / Love will not easily fade away / where the virgin often pursues the young man. / His noble nature is so prepared, / that he gladly receives her again / and places her close to his heart. / This easily eludes the foolish ones / who don’t like to seek out their lovers.

The word *minnen* in the first line of the poem as given in II, 4 is written as *minne* in II, 2, which the editor of the edition, Hans Neumann, derives from *miné* in the manuscript. See apparatus to II, 2: 2.

The song on the garland is: *Sin ovgen in min ovgen, /sin herze in min herze, /sin sele in min sele / umbevangen unverdrossen* (II, 4: 53–54; His eyes into my eyes, / His heart into my heart, / His soul into my soul / untiringly enclosed).

49. Finke, “Mystical Bodies.”

50. For an analysis of the broader interpretive significance of textiles in medieval literature, but in the context of medieval French romance, see Nancy A. Jones, “The Uses of Embroidery in the Romances of Jean Renart: Gender, History, Textuality,” in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance: Essays on Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Nancy Vine Durling (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 13–44; and, more recently, E. Jane Bums, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

51. Mechthild nevertheless repeatedly refers to her writings as a book, but this inconsistency reflects the tensions produced not only by her act of writing but also by her involvement in its publication and circulation. For a discussion of the passages where Mechthild refers to the book as such, see Nigel F. Palmer, “Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg,” in *Bildhafte Rede in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion*, ed. Wolfgang Harms and Klaus Speckenbach (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 2 17–35.

52. Considering that John the Baptist often appeared in artistic depictions of the Trinity, that in addition, he was considered a second ideal of chastity after Mary, and, finally, that it is he who first recognized Christ as Christ in a gesture in which he holds him in his hands, there is a certain logic to imagining him presiding over the transsubstantiation. Indeed, Mechthild argues this herself as I discuss later. For Mechthild’s understanding of John the Baptist in another vision, see Petrus Tax, “Die grosse Himmelsschau Mechthilds von Magdeburg und ihre Höllenvision,” *ZfdA* 108 (1979): 120–22.

53. “Fourth Lateran Council, 1215: Credo and Confession, Canons 1, 3 21,” in *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe: Documents in Translation*, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University

54. For a brief summary of the issues under debate, see Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (New York: Longman, 1992), 280–84. For more in-depth studies, see Paul H. Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence. A History of the Doctrine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 69–116; Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament According to the Theologians c.1080-c.1220* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), especially Chapter 3; and Peter Browe, *Die Verehrung der Eucharistie im Mittelalter* (Munich: Max Hüber, 1933/1967), 49–69.

55. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 71; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 51–52.

56. The anxiety associated with these properties becomes increasingly prevalent by the fifteenth century and is very much in evidence in popular culture by then, mostly in stories and scenes of Host desecration by socially marginalized and stigmatized groups—e.g., especially Jews and prostitutes. See Kathleen Biddick's intriguing, if sometimes problematic, rereading of Bynum's visual evidence in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, plates 1–30; Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. Nancy F. Partner (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy, 1993), 99–110.

57. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 174.

58. *Ibid.*, 70; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 53.

59. Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders," 106, citing Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 70–72. Rubin notes that reception of the chalice by the laity was only forbidden universally at the Council of Constance in 1415.

60. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 57. See also Eamon Duffy, *The Strippings of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

61. See, for example, the statue of John the Baptist on the outside of the Magdeburg Cathedral. John holds a circular medallion in the middle of which is the lamb and a cross. Around the edge of the medallion, John's famous words *Ecce agnus dei* are engraved. The statue dates from 1230–1235. Walther Greischel, *Der Magdeburger Dom* (Berlin: Atlantis, 1939), plate 64.

62. The conflation of the Eucharistic banquet with the image of the suffering lamb of God becomes increasingly common in medieval visual arts. Heinrich and Margarethe Schmidt, *Die vergessene Bildersprache christlicher Kunst: Ein Führer zum Verständnis der Tier-, Engel- und Mariensymbolik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1981), 75–76.

63. As Thomas Aquinas writes: "It is obvious to our senses that, after consecration, all the accidents of the bread and wine remain. Divine providence very wisely arranged for this. First of all, men have not the custom of eating human flesh and drinking human blood; indeed, the thought revolts them. And so the flesh and blood of Christ are given to us to be taken under the appearances of things in common human use, namely bread and wine." Paul Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence*, 95, citing "The Eucharistic Presence," in *Summa Theologicae*, vol. 58, trans. William Barden (New York: Blackfriars; McGraw-Hill, 1965), 3.75.2.

64. Recent scholarship on the contemplation of images among late medieval German nuns comes to mind here. See, for example, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, 118–20, where Hamburger juxtaposes the visions of Gertrude of Helfta and Lutgard of Aywières with illuminations depicting the celestial bride kissing the lamb; and idem, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), in particular, plates 10–12, the illustrations of the Eucharistic banquet taking place inside the heart of Christ. Mechthild's vision presents an intriguing reversal, however. The "banquet" takes place inside of her "heart" or soul where the lamb feeds on her.

65. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 135–39 for examples.

66. In the increasingly complex iconography of the Eucharist. Mary is sometimes depicted celebrating the mass. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 142–47.

67. Despite the debate about Hans Neumann's estimated dates for the writing of *The Flowing Light*, textual evidence like VI, 36, which comments on the vision in Book II, strongly suggests that Book VI was written after Book II. See Hans Neumann, "Beiträge zur Textgeschichte des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit* und zur Lebensgeschichte Mechthilds von Magdeburg," in *Altdeutsche und Altniederländische Mystik*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 182 for his chronology. See also Vollmann-Profe, "Mechthild—auch 'in Werktagskleidern'" for a more recent endorsement and elaboration of Neumann's chronology.

68. See Mechthild of Magdeburg. *The Flowing Light*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 345 n. 13, citing Luke 1: 41.

69. I refer to the medieval usage of *auctoritas* here, meaning containing God's truth. See Alistair J.

Chapter 3

1. For the scholarly debate surrounding this passage, see Chapter 1, n. 14.
2. A brief comment in the penultimate chapter of Book VII suggests that when her hands and eyes became too weak to write, Mechthild dictated the final chapters to her pious sisters (VII, 64: 6–10).
3. *Dis buoch ist begonnen in der minne, es sol ovch enden in der minne* (IV, 28: 3).
4. Above all, Hans Neumann, “Beiträge zur Textgeschichte des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*,” in *Altdeutsche und Altniederländische Mystik*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 189.
5. Gisela Vollmann-Profe summarizes these conclusions, in Vollmann-Profe, “Mechthild—auch ‘in Werktagskleidern’ Zu berühmten und weniger berühmten Abschnitten des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*,” *ZfdPh* 113, Special Issue (1994): 147 n. 5.
6. The Dominican house in Halle was founded in 1271. Neumann, “Beiträge zur Textgeschichte,” 235.
7. Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995), 3.
8. Mary Jeremy Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 17.
9. Gertrud die Grosse von Helfta, *Gesandter der göttlichen Liebe* (*Legatus divinae pietatis*), trans. Johanna Lanczkowski (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1989), 444–45. Mechthild also reports seeing God holding her book as a sign of authorization; *Do offenbarte sich got zehant miner trurigen sele und hielt dis buoch in siner vordern hant und sprach . . .* (II, 26: 7–8; Then God revealed himself immediately to my troubled soul and held the book in his right hand and spoke . . .).
10. Finnegan, *Women of Helfta*, 17. J. Müller, ed., *Leben und Offenbarungen der heiligen Mechtildis und der Schwester Mechtildis (von Magdeburg)*, 2 vols. (Regensburg: Georg Joseph Manz, 1880), here vol. 1, 269–70 (Book LV, chapter 8). There is still no modern edition of Mechthild of Hackeborn’s writings, nor are there any complete modern translations into English.
11. Finnegan, *Women of Helfta*, 3–5.
12. Although the dwindling authority of medieval women writers is now considered common in literary history, increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the varying conditions surrounding these “disappearances.” See, for example, Jennifer Summit’s work on the reception of Margery Kempe before and during the English Reformation in her *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 103–61; on the reception in England of Hildegard, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Marguerite Porete, Bridget of Sweden, Margery Kempe, and Catherine of Siena, see Rosalynn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996).
13. See Appendix A for a complete list. On *compilatio* as a means for organizing and studying information, see Alistair J. Minnis, “Late Medieval Discussions of *Compilatio* and the Role of the *Compiler*,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 101. 3 (1979): 385–421; and M. B. Parkes, “The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book,” in *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation, and Dissemination of Medieval Texts*, ed. M. B. Parkes (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 35–70. For the assembly of devotional anthologies in the German vernacular, the place to start is still Adolf Spamer, “Über die Zersetzung und Vererbung in den deutschen Mystikertexten” (Dissertation, Universität zu Gießen, 1910). In an article published after this book was in production, Seth Lerer argues that, in contrast to the continental compilers of vernacular literature, who “keyed themselves to narrative or thematic coherence or, more pointedly, to individual authorial expression [...], anonymity seems to control the early medieval English compilation.” Seth Lerer, “Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology,” *PMLA* 118 (2003): 1254. In this chapter and in Chapter 4, the anthologization of anonymous devotional texts in German is shown to be the logical outgrowth of the new mysticism developed by Mechthild of Magdeburg and others, as well as of the clerical reaction to it. Given this evidence, it would seem that the prevalence of anonymity in compilations is not an exclusively English phenomenon, although the *reasons* for collecting anonymous Lydgate texts as opposed to anonymous

mystical texts would certainly differ according to the particular conditions of production.

14. Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik* (Amsterdam: P. Shippers N.V., 1882/1966), 246.

15. Mainz, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. II 16 (Das Magdalenen-Buch), f. 152v. I am grateful to Anne Winston-Allen for alerting me to this and the following reference (n. 16) and for sharing copies of the relevant manuscript folios.

16. Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik. 4. Band. Die niederländische Mystik des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 4 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999), 264–65.

17. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977). See my discussion of the canon debates in the Preface.

18. Gisela Vollmann-Profe, “Prolegomena,” in Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, ed. Hans Neumann (Munich: Artemis, 1990), vol. 1, xiii.

19. Ibid.

20. The relevant manuscript designations for the Latin and German translations examined in this chapter are, respectively, Rb (Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. B IX 11), E (Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Msc. 277); for the three mystical handbooks, W (Würzburg, Franziskanerkloster, Hs. I 110), B (Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Cod. Germ. 38), and C (Colmar, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 2137)(W, B, and C contain 69, 19, and 81 chapters, respectively). For a complete list of manuscripts transmitting *The Flowing Light*, see Appendix A.

21. Similar questions of legitimacy and female authorship are negotiated by the medieval biographer of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). See Joan Ferrante, “Scribe quae vides et audis: Hildegard, Her Language, and Her Secretaries,” in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 102–35.

22. Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 3, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

23. “Were ich ein geleret geistlich man, und hettistu dis einig grosse wunder an im getan, so moehtistu sin ewige ere empfaen” (II, 26: 18–19).

24. “Ich han da inne ungehoertú ding gesehen, als mine bihter sagent, wan ich der schrift ungeleret bin” (III, 1: 36–37).

25. “Do hies er mich das, des ich mich dikke weinende schemme, [. . .], das was, das er ein snoeden wibe hies us gottes herzen und munt dis buoch schriben. Alsust ist dis buoch minnenklich von gotte har komen und ist us menschlichen sinnen nit genommen” (IV, 2: 130–34).

26. Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum: Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), 53–67.

27. Susanne Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit: Zur Struktur mystischer Rede im Spannungsfeld von Latein und Volkssprache* (Tübingen: Francke, 1993), 38.

28. For example, see Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 4; Odo Egres, “Mechthild von Magdeburg: *The Flowing Light of God*,” in *Cistercians in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 29–31; and John Margetts, “Latein und Volkssprache bei Mechthild von Magdeburg,” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik* 12 (1977): 125, all of whom base their information on Hans Neumann’s work, in particular his essay, “Beiträge zur Textgeschichte,” and, in Tobin’s case, also on Neumann’s critical edition of Mechthild. There are two dissertations on the Latin revelations which focus primarily on using the Latin version to “improve” the German version or clarify its meaning. Hubert Stierling, “Studien zu Mechthild von Magdeburg” (Dissertation, University of Göttingen, 1907) and Ernst Becker, “Beiträge zur lateinischen und deutschen Überlieferung des *Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit*” (Dissertation, University of Göttingen, 1951). Except for these studies, there is no comprehensive study of the Latin translation as a translation. Such a study is made more difficult by the transcription errors made in the 1877 Latin edition, the only printed edition available. A new edition of the Latin version, printed parallel to Rw (see Appendix A), is currently being prepared by Elke Senne and Ernst Hellgardt. See also Elke Senne, “Das *Fließende Licht der Gottheit* Mechthilds von Magdeburg: Die Fassung der sogenannten Wolhusener Handschrift, Text und Untersuchung” (Dissertation, University of Munich, 2002).

29. Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Das fliessende Licht*, vol. 1, 11, and note to I, 4: 8 in vol. 2, 9. Although *salutare* means “salvation” in the context of the Psalm, the verb also means “to wish health to, to greet.” Perhaps the use of the word *gruos* (greeting) in Mechthild’s and other mystics’ texts was inspired by the multiple meanings of the Latin word. Thanks to Barbara Newman for suggesting this.

30. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 15.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 24.

33. “et religiose intelligenda, et secundum morem aliarum sanctarum scripturarum, sane et fideliter; sic nullum in ea lector scandalum habebit vel *offendiculum*, ipsaque scriptura nullam calumniam perfidia sustinebit [emphasis added].” Prologue to the *Lux divinitatis*, in *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, vol. 2: *Sancta Mechthildis virginis ordinis Sancti Benedicti Liber specialis gratiae; accedit sororis Mechthildis ejusdem ordinis Lux Divinitatis*, ed. Solesmes Monks (Louis Paquelin) (Paris: Oudin, 1877), 436 (hereafter referred to as *Lux divinitatis*). The English translation here is Frank Tobin’s. See Mechthild von Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 32.

34. For the transmission of Bernard’s sermons in German, see Werner Hover, *Theologia Mystica in altbairischer Übertragung; Bernhard von Clairvaux, Bonaventura, Hugo von Balma, Jean Gerson, Bernhard von Waging und andere: Studien zum Übersetzungswerk eines Tegernseer Anonymus aus der Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1971), 5–51. For the role of the Song of Songs in the development of vernacular mysticism in Germany, see Urban Küsters, *Der verschlossene Garten: Volkssprachliche Hohelied-Auslegung und monastische Lebensform im 12. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1985). For an analysis of the Psalmic imagery in Mechthild’s writings, see Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), chapter 3. I am grateful to Elizabeth Andersen for sharing with me an article-length version of this chapter in advance of its publication.

35. See Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 11–12. My comments take Tobin’s observation a step further, arguing that in order to make this audience “benevolent,” the editors must efface or mitigate the text’s female author. As Barbara Newman notes, this strategy was prominent in Hildegard of Bingen’s writings and also appears in the tenth-century writings of Hrotsvit. In the thirteenth century and beyond, the strategy is used mainly by male hagiographers of holy women. Newman speculates that the topos “remained in wide usage because it allowed male writers to acknowledge the presence of heroic sanctity in women and to confess the general failings of their own sex, while at the same time affirming that men were naturally meant to be ‘the strong’ and ‘the wise.’” Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard’s Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 256.

36. Elegit namque persaepe infirma mundi omnipotens Deus ut fortiora salubriter erubescant. [. . .] sexui fragili sua revelans mysteria, qui tempore legis mosaicae dignatus est similia misericorditer operari. Et quia populus Israel Debborae vaticinio credidit, liberationem ab oppressione et de hostibus victoriam est adeptus. Rex quoque cultor Dei, per orationem et consilium Oldae prophetissae, consolationem et misericordiam meruit invenire. Sic etiam omnes qui hunc librum scripturi vel lecturi sunt, si tamen pia intentione intenderint, incrementum consolationis et gratiae spiritus, sicut in ipso promissum est a Domino, consequentur. *Lux divinitatis*, 436; English translation: Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, 31–32.

37. See Chapter 1. For Eustace of Arras’s text, see Nicole Bériou, “The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 138 and 144 n. 26.

38. *Lux divinitatis*, 436; Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, 31–32.

39. Nigel Palmer makes this point about the Latin prologue in Nigel Palmer, “Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg,” in *Bildhafte Rede in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Wolfgang Harms and Klaus Speckenbach (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 218–19. On the use of the Aristotelian prologue, see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 28–29 and 33–39.

40. Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 5.

41. “L,” London, British Library, Add. 11430. P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*. In his edition, Strauch has rearranged the letters in chronological order.

42. “sitlichen und nit ze vil und wolchüi wort ir nit verstandint, die zeichend und schribentz mir, so betützsch ichs euch, wan es ward uns gar in fremdem tützsch gelichen, das wir wol zwai jar flisz und arbeit hetint, ee wirs ain wenig in unser tützsch brachtint.” P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 246–47. The precise copy that Heinrich sent does not survive, though it is thought that all of the vernacular manuscripts (except for R_w) descend from copies of his translation.

43. The Mechthild quotes are from I, 22; V, 6; and IV, 12. See London, British Library, Add. 11430, f. 65^v, 66^v, and 71^{r-v} and P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 251–52, 256, and 257, respectively.

Another chapter from *The Flowing Light* concludes the letter collection (V, 35). Hans Neumann prints this concluding prayer in his "Fragmenta Mechtildiana Inedita," *Ann. Acad. Scient. Fenn. B* 84 (1954): 164–67.

44. Mechthild's book may also have functioned in this way for the writing nuns at Helfta, although such a conjecture is difficult to prove.

45. P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 240.

46. *Ibid.*, 243–44.

47. *Ibid.*, 247. On Christina Ebner's relationship to Heinrich of Nördlingen, see Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum*, 169–76; Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 19; and Susanne Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster: Historische Funktion und rhetorische Legitimation frauenmystischer Texte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999), 300. Also relevant here, though appearing after this book went into production, is Johanna Thali, *Beten – Schreiben – Lesen: Literarisches Leben und Marienspiritualität im Kloster Engelthal* (Tübingen: Francke, 2003). I am grateful to Michael Curschmann for telling me of this publication.

48. P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 228–29. Heinrich's request here underscores my argument in Chapter 1 that women religious were often literate in both Latin and German. Heinrich's instruction to the nuns to borrow the Latin "Clock of Wisdom" and copy it for themselves is a clear indication that they could read, write, and understand Latin.

49. P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 217.

50. *Ibid.*, 238.

51. *Ibid.*, 244: "ich bitt euch auch durch alle träu, das ir mir das buch wider gewinnet Summam contra gentiles, wan irs recht und redlich kauft hant [. . .] ist es sein als gut und als recht, als mir unser Chursor geseit haut" (I ask you also in the name of being true that you get the *Summa contra gentiles* back for me, for you have rightly and properly bought it, . . . if it is as good and as righteous as our Cursor has told me).

52. Mechthild's name appears four times in E: twice in Book V (V, 32: 1; V 35: 1) and twice in Book VI (VI, 42: 1; VI, 43: 3). These instances appear to be the work of an editor or a scribe.

53. P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 251 and 257.

54. The "friends of God" were both men and women. However, there is no material evidence of any men receiving Mechthild's book from Heinrich of Nördlingen or of their ownership of it.

55. "das got in im selber ist und in diszem buch bewiszt hat." P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 246.

56. *dis buoch [wart] geoffent in túsche von gotte einer swester, was ein helig maget beide an lip und an geiste* (Foreword, 34–35). Paraphrasing Eustace's comments on this subject, Nicole Bériou writes: "In his [Eustace's] opinion, the Holy Spirit inspired these women and gave authority to their teachings. Saint Paul's interdiction did not concern them, but it was directed against married women only. The friar implicitly stated that virgins were allowed to speak in public, when the Holy Spirit inspired them." Nicole Bériou, "The Right of Women," 138.

57. P. Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner*, 242 and 249.

58. Einsiedeln, Msc. 277, f. 1^r. Printed in Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 176:

Den swesteren in der vorderen ovwe / Ir soent wissen / das das buoch / das úch wart / von der zem Guldin Ringe / das do heist / das liecht der Gotheit / des soent ir wol warnemen / also das es sol dienen in alle húser des waldes / und sol us dem walde niemer kommen / und sol ie ein monat in eim huse sin / also das es umb sol gan / von eim in das ander / wenne man sin bedarf / und soent ir sin sunderlich behuot sin / wand si sunderlich trúwe zuo úch hatte / bittent ovch fúr mich / der ir bichter was / leider unwirdig / Von mir Her Heinrich von Rumershein von Basel ze sant Peter.

To the sisters of the forward valley, you should know that the book that was sent to you by her of the Golden Ring, that is called the Light of the Godhead, of this you should take note, that it should serve in all the houses of the forest and should never come out of the forest and should stay in each house for one month, so that it goes around from one house to another if one has need of it, and you should be its special protector for she [Margaret] had a special loyalty to you. Pray also for me, who was her confessor, unfortunately unworthy. From me, Lord Henry Rumershein of Basel at Saint Peter's.

A similar instruction from Henry Rumersheim appears in Einsiedeln Msc. 278 where the patron is named as *Greten zem guldin King* (f. 1). See Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das Fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 185. Grete is short for Margaretha or Margaret.

59. On textual communities, see Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); and Diane Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in Their Communities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

60. For the twelfth-century German translation of and commentary on the Song of Songs, see Hermann Menhardt, ed., *Das St. Trudperter Hohe Lied: Kritische Ausgabe* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1934). For Bernard's sermons in German, see Hover, *Theologia Mystica*, 5–51.

61. John Coakley, "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 222–46.

62. It would be interesting to compare Elisabeth's situation with that of Angela of Foligno (d. 1309), a married woman turned mystic after her husband and family perished and whose dictation of her religious experiences was recorded by a local Franciscan friar.

63. Walter Haug, "Das Gespräch mit dem unvergleichlichen Partner: Der mystische Dialog bei Mechthild von Magdeburg als Paradigma für eine personale Gesprächsstruktur," in *Das Gespräch*, ed. Karlheinz Stierle and Rainer Warning (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984), 268.

64. Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 157.

65. Bernard McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism," *Church History* 65 (1996): 203.

66. Neumann discusses and lists the marginalia in manuscripts E and C in Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das Fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 206–32.

67. For manuscript designations and contents, see Appendices A–D.

68. On the macaronic form in religious writing, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

69. Hans-Jochen Schiewer argues that the vernacular devotional compilations preserved in fifteenth-century manuscripts were initially compiled by religious women (Dominican nuns) in the fourteenth century. Further, he suggests that these women used the *compilatio* method as a strategy to produce texts creatively without taking up the role of author, which was forbidden to them. The fact that all of the compilers involved with the three manuscripts in my study remain nameless might be interpreted as support for this assertion. However, as will become clear, the Würzburg manuscript's outspoken didactic and pastoral agenda (Latin grammar and sermon outlines) and the Colmar manuscript's agenda to reform errant friars suggest that vernacular compilations were not only composed by or meant for cloistered women. The circumstances of production of the Budapest manuscript are more difficult to pin down. However, the fact that two male scribes identify themselves as copyists qualifies another of Schiewer's speculations: namely, that the copying of vernacular devotional literature in the fifteenth century was primarily the domain of reformed women. Hans-Jochen Schiewer, "Uslesen: Das Weiterwirken mystischen Gedankenguts im Kontext dominikanischer Frauengemeinschaften," in *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang: Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte. Kolloquium Kloster Fischingen 1998*, ed. Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 592–601. For more on the relationship between women's convents, the observance movement, and the flowering of devotional literature in the fifteenth century, see Chapter 4. On the genesis of *compilatio* as a method among scholastic authors in the thirteenth century, see Minnis, "Late Medieval Discussions." On the relationship between *compilatio* and medieval understandings of authorship, see idem, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 190–210; and Ralph Hanna III, "Compilatio and the Wife of Bath: Latin Backgrounds, Ricardian Texts," in *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), 1–11.

70. Wilhelm Schleussner, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*. Das fließende Licht der Gottheit nach einer neu gefundenen Handschrift (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1929). Schleussner's description has been corrected and expanded in volume 2 of Hans Neumann's Mechthild edition: Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, vol. 2, 239–69. The following description relies on Neumann.

71. On *compilatio* as a literary form, see Minnis, "Late Medieval Discussions." Although this form had "a considerable amount of thought and industry put into it," *compilatores* did not bear the same responsibility or *auctoritas* as the *auctores* they were excerpting and citing (388).

72. Ralph Hanna III, "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England," in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 47.

73. Hanna, "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity," 47. Andrew Taylor notes about the English context that by the fifteenth century, some standardization of manuscript anthologies was taking place. Andrew Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 358–59. Similar conditions were present in Germany in the fifteenth century as well. Tilo Brandis, "Handschriften- und Buchproduktion im 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert," in *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*, ed. Ludger Grenzmann and Karl Stackmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), 182. On the organizational sense of compilations containing rhymed-couplet texts, see Sarah Westphal, *Textual Poetics of German Manuscripts 1300–1500* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1993).

74. Hanna, "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity," 37.

75. *Ibid.*, 47.

76. On the booklet as a unit and as part of a compilation, see P. R. Robinson, "The 'Booklet': A Self-contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts," *Codicologica* 3 (1980): 46–69.

77. Vincent Gillespie, "Vernacular Books of Religion," in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 318.

78. W thus offers us a German example of what Gillespie has argued for England: "regardless of the original intentions of authors (or compilers), or of later editors, the manuscripts of most religious texts are likely to suggest a range of identifiably different uses to which each was put." Gillespie, "Vernacular Books," 324.

79. Schleussner publishes this revelation in his 1929 study and offers a reconstructed original order, which was then slightly corrected by Gisela Kornrumpf in 1969. Schleussner, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, v; András Vizkelety and Gisela Kornrumpf, "Budapester Fragmente des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*," *ZfdA* 97 (1968): 298 n. 5. See also Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 240.

80. Hans Neumann bases the supposition of the compiler's age on the handwriting style and the types of mistakes (orthographic and memory) present in the manuscript. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 260–64; Vizkelety and Kornrumpf, "Budapester Fragmente," 298–99 n. 5. Except for two chapters that the Würzburg scribe copied twice by mistake, it is impossible to distinguish his innovations from those of his source. For this reason, I assume a plural authorship and will refer in the following discussion to its composers in the plural form: compilers, scribes, authors.

81. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 136.

82. Attributions of the Latin passages are from Schleussner, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 94–101.

83. The "chapter meeting" refers to the "chapter of faults." During this meeting, residents of a monastic community confess sins committed since the last meeting and accuse others if they have not confessed themselves. The abbess or abbot then assigns penances accordingly. Christ in this vision acts as the monastic superior. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 136.

84. Schleussner did not identify this allusion. However, Barbara Newman was able to identify it as a reference to a well-known quote from John 15: 13, that varies only slightly. It begins "majorem dilectionem . . ." (Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends).

85. W, f. 42^{va}; Schleussner, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 177.

86. W, f. 42^{va}; Schleussner, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 177: "*Humilitas ad deum*. In der demutigen einvaltheit. *Paupertas in creaturis uel ad creaturas*. In dem elende armuete. *Patientia ad proximum*." Und in der fordruchin smacheit hatt got mir sine wndir erzogit (modifying III, 1: 39–41; Humility toward/before God. In humble simplicity. Poverty in creatures and before creatures. In miserable poverty. Patience toward one's neighbour. And in [my] oppressive shame God has created His miracle in me).

87. Neumann also makes this observation. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 265.

88. Cf. Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones Vulgares*. See Thomas Frederick Crane, ed., *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry* (London: D. Nutt, 1890); and David L. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris Before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 127–28. See also Elisabeth of Schönau's model sermon collection in the *Book of the Ways of God*, which is addressed to a similar set of *ordines*. Elisabeth of Schönau, *The Complete Works*, trans. Anne L. Clark and preface by Barbara Newman (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 164–65.

89. The youth (adolescents) is followed by the abbreviation for “etc.” Not untypically, the scribes misquote the Song here, using the word for young person as opposed to the diminutive for “dear little girls” (*adulescentulae*) used in the Vulgate. This and other similar errors suggest that the clerics were quoting from memory.

90. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 268–69.

91. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 269: *brautmystische Vorstellungen . . . sind ja nicht auf Frauenkonvente und Beginenhäuser beschränkt*.

92. See the discussion of this issue in Chapter 1. See also Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10: “Similarly, learning by hearing material and reciting aloud should not be confused with ignorance of reading. Especially in describing the Middle Ages, when the criterion of being *litteratus* was knowledge of Latin, one should be careful to remember that some degree of bilingualism (Latin and a vernacular) was a fact of every educated European’s life . . .”

93. Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften im Auftrag der Württembergischen Kommission für Landesgeschichte*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1907); Henry Suso, *The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Pius Künzle, ed., *Heinrich Seuses Horologium sapientiae: Erste kritische Ausgabe, unter Benützung der Vorarbeiten von Dominikus Planzer, OP* (Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1977).

94. Annelies Julia Hofmann, *Der Eucharistie-Traktat Marquards von Lindau* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960).

95. Parts I and III carry a colophon bearing the date of 1416. Although Part II has no date, the handwriting and paper suggest that it was copied around the same time. Vizkelely and Kornrumpf, “Budapester Fragmente,” 279–80.

96. Kornrumpf suggests that the variations in vocabulary evident in B (as opposed to E) were the result of numerous redactions, but also that one of these redactions was significant insofar as it thoroughly updated the vocabulary, replacing outdated words like *minne* with *liebe*. Some of the mistakes in the Budapest manuscript can be traced back to these types of changes. In other words, they do not make sense as mistakes made in copying the version we have in E. Kornrumpf reads these mistakes as proof that Pellengriesser was not the person who made this particular compilation of Mechthild’s writings. Vizkelely and Kornrumpf, “Budapester Fragmente,” 284–86 and 303–4.

97. Pellengriesser adds four lines from VI, 23 to V, 4 (B, f. 226^v). His own scribal addition appears on B, f. 234^v. Neumann transcribes the Mechthild selection in B in its entirety in volume 2 of his critical edition. For these sections, see Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 278 (lines 19–22) and 284 (lines 238–41).

98. András Vizkelely, *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der altdutschen Hand-schriften in ungarischen Bibliotheken* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969), vol. 1, 106–8; Georg Hofmann, “Seuses Werke in deutschsprachigen Handschriften des späten Mittelalters,” *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 45.4–6 (1969): 182.

99. G. Hofmann, “Seuse’s Werke,” 138–49 and 176–83; the Budapest manuscript is listed on page 182. Seuse’s Latin version of this book, the *Horologium Sapientiae*, was also extremely popular (second only to the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas a Kempis); Pius Künzle, the editor of the critical edition, records 214 complete and 19 incomplete manuscripts; 88 additional manuscripts are known to have existed but have been lost; and translations into eight vernaculars other than German. Künzle, *Heinrich Seuses Horologium Sapientiae*, 105–214 and 250–76.

100. A. Hofmann, *Der Eucharistie-Traktat*, 22–173.

101. See also Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, 325; Suso, *The Exemplar*, 304. The version in B bears slight variations from that printed in Bihlmeyer’s edition and Tobin’s translation. Tobin notes that because this paragraph appears only in manuscripts that contain only the “Little Book” and not the entire Exemplar (Seuse’s *Life* and complete works), it might not be authentic. However, he also notes that it coincides with the sentiments Seuse expresses in the prologue to *The Exemplar*, 398 n. 133.

102. Kurt Ruh, *Meister Eckhart: Theologe, Prediger, Mystiker*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 1989), 168–86; Bernard McGinn, “Eckhart’s Condemnation Reconsidered,” *The Thomist* 44. 3 (1980): 390–414; Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., “Historical Data,” in Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 12–15. For information on the reception of Eckhart’s condemnation in southwestern Germany, see Robert E. Lerner, “New Evidence for the Condemnation of Meister Eckhart,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 347–66.

103. McGinn, “Eckhart’s Condemnation,” 401–2.

104. Some doubt exists, however, as to whether Eckhart was being completely straightforward in

his defense, for claims are there in the Latin works that agree with condemned statements he denied having made in the defense, in particular the discussions of the part of the soul that remains uncreated.

105. McGinn, "Eckhart's Condemnation," 401–2.

106. Hildegard writes in the *Scivias*: "But whoever rashly conceals these words written by the finger of God, madly abridging them, or for any human reason taking them to a strange place and scoffing at them, let him be reprobate; and the finger of God shall crush him." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 536. Marie does not want clerics to take credit for her translation of *St Patrick's Purgatory*. Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1987/1994), 277–78. On Chaucer's *Troilus*, see Ralph Hanna III, "The Manuscripts and Transmission of Chaucer's *Troilus*," in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*, ed. Christian K. Zacher and James M. Dean (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 173–88.

107. For example, see Konrad of Heimesfurt, a thirteenth-century cleric, author of *Urstende*, a poem based on apocryphal texts from the Book of Nicodemus. See also Konrad of Fußesbrunnen's *Kindheit Jesu*, 1200–1220; and Walther of Rheinau's *Marienleben*, last quarter of the thirteenth century. Bruno Quast, "Der feste Text: Beobachtungen zur Beweglichkeit des Textes aus Sicht der Produzenten," in *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150–1450*, ed. Ursula Peters (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 34–46.

108. See, for example, Joachim Bumke, "Der unfeste Text: Überlegungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik der höfischen Epik im 13. Jahrhundert," in "*Aufführung*" und "*Schrift*" in *Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 118–129; and Peter Strohschneider, "Situationen des Textes: Okkasionelle Bemerkungen zur 'New Philology,'" *ZfdPh* 116, Special Issue (1997): 62–86.

109. Quast, "Der feste Text," 36.

110. On *inventio* and translation in secular literature, see Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Copeland specifically brackets her study to exclude the very different circumstances surrounding the translation/adaptation of religious sources (5). See also the essays in Elizabeth Andersen et al., eds., *Autor und Autorschaft im Mittelalter: Kolloquium Meissen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998).

111. McGinn, "Eckhart's Condemnation," 401–2; for the complete text of the bull, see "In agro dominico" (March 27, 1329), in Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, 77–81.

112. Frank Tobin, "Introduction," in Suso, *The Exemplar*, 33.

113. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 124.

114. G. Hofmann, "Seuse's Werke," 138–49 and 176–83. On the puzzling nature of Seuse's naming in these manuscripts and those transmitting *The Exemplar*, see Stephanie Altmann and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler, "Vom diener der ewigen weisheit zum Autor Heinrich Seuse: Autorschaft und Medienwandel in den illustrierten Handschriften und Drucken von Heinrich Seuses *Exemplar*," in *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150–1450*, ed. Ursula Peters (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 150–81.

115. Because I have only examined this manuscript on microfilm, I rely on Vizkelely for descriptions of color. Vizkelely and Kornrumpf, "Budapester Fragmente," 279–80. Vizkelely records the colors differently in his catalog, however (black, red, and yellow). Vizkelely, *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis*, vol. 1, 108.

116. On the implications of changing formats in medieval books, see Nigel F. Palmer, "Kapitel und Buch: Zu den Gliederungsprinzipien mittelalterlicher Bücher," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 23 (1989): 43–88.

117. G. Hofmann, "Seuse's Werke," 179; Breslau, Cathedral Library, Ms. 46. Hofmann notes that there are conflicting accounts of this manuscript among scholars; while Bihlmeyer claims that the codex contains chapters 1, 2, and 5, P. Swietochowski finds no Seuse in the manuscript.

118. Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 124–31.

119. Vizkelely and Kornrumpf, "Budapester Fragmente," 279 n. 2: Cod. 875 of the Neuberg (Cistercian) library between Graz and Vienna; clm. 9742 from Oberaltaich; and St. Florian Cod. 39.

120. Vizkelely and Kornrumpf, "Budapester Fragmente," 279 n. 2; Pellengriesser represents the more common fate of professional scribes, a fate that we can perhaps contrast to that of scribes who actually did compose and publish poetic works like Thomas Hoccleve. See Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park:

121. Vizkelety notes that the bookseller sold the manuscript to the famous collector Nikolaus Jankovich (1772–1846), the man whose bequest donated the manuscript (and his entire collection) to the Hungarian National Library upon his death. Vizkelety and Kornrumpf, “Budapester Fragmente,” 281.

122. Just before Pellengriesser signs and dates the booklet, he writes: *Hye hat das puech ein end. In dem man got minichleich erchent O lieber herr von himelreich mach uns dir all gleich* (B, f. 244v; Here the book has its end in which one lovingly perceives God. O dear Lord of heaven, make us all alike before you). See Figure 3.

123. Georg Steer, “Mönch von Heilsbronn,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), vol. 8, 651–52.

124. Ibid., 651. The emphasis on stages of contemplation is indebted to texts by Bernard’s contemporaries such as Hugh (1096–1141) and Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), as well as by later theologians like Bonaventura (1215–1274). Albrecht Wagner, *Über den Mönch von Heilsbronn* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1876), 70. The absence of the prologue is a further indication that the theory of authorship at work in these compilations diverges from that described by Minnis. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*.

125. This comment is perhaps a reference to an event similar to that which inspired the vision of John the Baptist (II, 4) discussed in Chapter 2.

126. Mechthild’s poetic inclinations are clearly just as much in evidence when she writes of hell as they are in the rapturous accounts of union with the divine. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the strategic use of rhyme in Mechthild’s praise and critique of the clergy.

127. Paul-Gerhard Völker, “Neues zur Überlieferung des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*,” *Zfda* 96 (1967): 32; Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das Fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 235.

128. Barbara Newman finds this impulse to intercede on behalf of suffering souls to be a particular characteristic of medieval female piety. See Barbara Newman, “On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women,” in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, ed. Barbara Newman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 108–36.

129. We might think of Marguerite Porete here, who, in a sense, was burned at the stake for not following “good counsel”—she refused to renounce her book after it was condemned and burned in her presence by the Bishop of Cambrai sometime between 1296 and 1306; once she was arrested by the Inquisition in 1309, she refused to answer any inquisitorial questions after the book had been condemned again, this time by twenty-one theologians in Paris. She was burned at the stake in May of 1310. See Ellen L. Babinsky, “Introduction” in Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* trans., Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 20–26; see also Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); and Michael G. Sargent, “The Annihilation of Marguerite Porete,” *Viator* 28 (1997): 253–79.

130. According to the liturgical calendar, Alexis’s feast day is July 17, Christopher’s is July 25.

131. Werner Williams-Krapp, “Die deutschen Übersetzungen der ‘Legenda Aurea’ des Jacobus de Voragine,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 101.2 (1979): 252–76; idem. *Die deutschen und niederländischen Legendare des Mittelalters: Studien zu ihrer Überlieferungs-, Text-, und Wirkungsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986).

132. Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 201.

133. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination*, 202–4.

134. Raymond of Capua, for example, the author of Catherine of Siena’s *Vita*, was an early proponent of observance in the Dominican order.

135. Bernard Neidiger, “Die Observanzbewegungen der Bettelorden in Südwestdeutschland,” *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte* 11 (1992): 178: “dem Zurückgehen der Ordenszucht bei den Konventualen und dem frommen, musterhaften Lebenswandel der Observanten zu suchen, die durch ihr erbauliches Beispiel, durch Eifer in der Predigt und Seelsorge und andächtige Verrichtung des Gottesdienstes segensreich auf das Volk einwirkten,” quoting Ferdinand Doelle, “Die Observanzbewegung in der sächsischen Franziskanerprovinz (Mittel- und Ostdeutschland) bis zum Generalkapitel von Parma 1529,” *Reformations-geschichtliche Studien und Texte* 30, 31: 59. See also Werner Williams-Krapp, “Frauenmystik und Ordensreform im 15. Jahrhundert,” in *Literarische Interessenbildung im Mittelalter: DFG-Symposium 1991*, ed. Joachim Heinzle (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993), 301–13.

Chapter 4

1. From an anonymous German translation of Humbert of Romans' commentary on the Augustinian rule, quoted in Werner Williams-Krapp, "Ordensreform und Literatur im 15. Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 4 (1986–87): 43, citing Marie-Claire Däniker-Gysin, *Geschichte des Dominikanerinnenklosters Töß 1233–1525* (Winterthur: Stadtbibliothek, 1957), 61. A. Hauber speculates that the translator is Johannes Meyer. A. Hauber, "Deutsche Handschriften in Frauenklöstern des späteren Mittelalters," *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 31.8 (1914): 347 n. 1.

2. See Appendix A for a complete list of manuscripts. The Mechthild passages in the manuscript designated as L (London, British Library, Add 11430) are part of Heinrich von Nördlingen's collection of letters to Margaret Ebner. Because this manuscript is dated to the sixteenth century and because it is not the same kind of devotional handbook as the other eleven, it will not be considered here.

3. Ha contains fragments of four chapters, S fragments of three; the rest transmit only one chapter.

4. English scholarship, for example, commonly holds that the number of fifteenth-century vernacular manuscripts generally (not just religious) "far exceeds the output of any preceding century . . ." H. S. Bennett, "The Production and Dissemination of Vernacular Manuscripts in the Fifteenth Century," *The Library* 5th Series 1 (1947): 169. See also Hans Löffing, "Die Fortdauer der handschriftlichen Buchherstellung nach der Erfindung des Buchdrucks—ein buchgeschichtliches Problem," in *Buch und Text im 15. Jahrhundert / Book and Text in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and Helmar Härtel (Hamburg: Hauswedell & Co, 1981), 18, who notes the increase in surviving manuscripts that date back to the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a clear indication of the notable increase in book production *before* the invention of printing. See also Tilo Brandis, "Handschriften- und Buchproduktion im 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert," in *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*, ed. Ludger Grenzmann and Karl Stackmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), 182–83.

5. For this argument with regard to the German-speaking regions, see Werner Williams-Krapp, "Ordensreform und Literatur," 41. See also idem, "Frauenmystik und Ordensreform im 15. Jahrhundert," in *Literarische Interessenbildung im Mittelalter: DFG-Symposium 1991*, ed. Joachim Heinze (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993), 301–13; and idem, "Observanzbewegungen, monastische Spiritualität und geistliche Literatur im 15. Jahrhundert," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 20.1 (1995): 1–15. The relationship between religious women and the production of vernacular German literature was first brought to light by Herbert Grundmann, "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Schrifttums in der Volkssprache," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 26 (1936): 129–61.

6. Williams-Krapp, "Ordensreform und Literatur," 47. For a complete listing of these manuscripts, see Georg Hofmann, "Seuses Werke in deutschsprachigen Handschriften des späten Mittelalters," *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 45.4–6 (1969): 113–208.

7. For a complete list of the Sisterbook transmission, see Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth Century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 286–89. Lewis's book also includes the texts of eight of the nine Sisterbooks on microfiche.

8. Armando Petrucci makes this point for the Italian context, but as will become clear, it is also true for the German-speaking regions. Armando Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, trans. Charles M. Radding (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 18.

9. Andrew Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons, and Books," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 354.

10. See my discussion of the Würzburg manuscript in Chapter 3.

11. Geneviève Hasenohr, "Religious Reading Amongst the Laity in France in the Fifteenth Century," in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 210. Hasenohr also remarks that the French clergy largely ignored this vernacular literature in producing guidelines for devotional reading. She attributes this attitude to the persistence of scholastic culture in France where the clergy continued to favor and recommend translations of established Latin texts on contemplation for religious edification, a recommendation reflected in surviving inventories of medieval lay libraries. In Italy, by contrast, humanism was already beginning to take root and the clergy placed more value in vernacular compositions (210–15). For more on Italian religious literature, see Katherine Gill, "Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300–1500," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and*

Artistic Renaissance, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Oakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64–104. On the development of medieval books in Italy generally, see Petrucci, *Writers and Readers*.

12. Jennifer Summit writes of the “feminization of devotion as an English genre [that] had begun in manuscript culture generations before the coming of print, as reflected in the frequency with which devotional treatises are addressed to women.” Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 113. See also Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Bella Millett, “Women in No Man’s Land: English Recluses and the Development of Vernacular Literature in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 86–103; Ann M. Hutchinson, “Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household,” in *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), 215–27; Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

13. Because the dissolution of the monasteries happened much later on the continent (1803 in Germany), their collections were preserved on a larger-scale than in England and in a comparatively few modern locations. A. I. Doyle, “Book Production by the Monastic Orders in England 1375–1530: Assessing the Evidence,” in *Medieval Book Production: Assessing the Evidence*, ed. Linda L. Brownrigg (Los Altos Hills, Calif: Anderson-Lovelace, 1990), 2.

14. For an excellent overview of the manuscript culture in England, see Andrew Taylor, “Authors, Scribes, Patrons, and Books.” For different perspectives on the importance of manuscript context (the situatedness of texts in manuscripts), see, for example, Ralph Hanna III, “Miscellaneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England,” in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 37–51, as well as the other essays in this volume; Derek Pearsall, “Texts, Textual Criticism, and Fifteenth-Century Manuscript Production,” in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yaeger (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Press, 1984), 121–36; Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, “Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 279–315; and Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,” in *Book Production and Publishing*, ed. Griffiths and Pearsall, 317–44. On the methodology surrounding this “new” interest, see the special issue of *Speculum*: Stephen Nichols, ed., *The New Philology, Speculum 65* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1990). For the German scene, see Peter Strohschneider, “Situationen des Textes: Okkasionelle Bemerkungen zur ‘New Philology,’” *ZfdP* 116, Special Issue (1997): 62–86, as well as the other essays in this volume, which was a response to the *Speculum* special issue. See also Werner Williams-Krapp, “Die Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Methode: Rückblick und Ausblick,” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 25.2 (2000): 1–21. The German scholarship on medieval manuscript and book production is also voluminous. For the most important titles in this bibliography, see Nikolaus Staubach, “Der Codex als Ware: Wirtschaftliche Aspekte der Handschriftenproduktion im Bereich der *Devotio moderna*,” in *Der Codex im Gebrauch*, ed. Christel Meier, Dagmar Hüpper, and Hagen Keller (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1996), 144 n. 3. Finally, for an exemplary study of compilation manuscripts that closely analyzes the relationship between texts, textgroupings, and book production in manuscripts transmitting rhymed couplet narratives, see Sarah Westphal, *Textual Poetics of German Manuscripts 1300–1500* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1993).

15. Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 1–2. See also, Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” *Speculum* 70 (1995): 822–64.

16. On Lollardy and vernacular books, see “Lollardy and Literacy,” in Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 193–216.

17. Margaret Hülsmann notes that for the northern Netherlands, roughly 2000 decorated manuscripts of religious content survive (mostly Books of Hours), the majority of which were produced in the fifteenth century in the context of the *Devotio moderna*. Margaret Hülsmann “Decorating Penwork and Book Production: Evidence for Localizing Northern Netherland Manuscripts,” in *Making the Medieval Book: Techniques of Production*, ed. Linda L. Brownrigg (Los Altos Hills, Calif.:

Anderson-Lovelace, 1995), 93–110. See also J. P. Gumbert, *The Dutch and Their Books in the Manuscript Age* (London: British Library, 1990), and Staubach, “Der Codex als Ware.”

18. For a comprehensive look at reform in all the orders, see the essays in Kaspar Elm, ed., *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989). For the mendicant orders, see Bernhard Neidiger, “Die Observanzbewegungen der Bettelorden in Südwestdeutschland,” *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte* 11 (1992): 175–96; and idem., “Selbstverständnis und Erfolgchancen der Dominikanerobservanten: Beobachtungen zur Entwicklung in der Provinz Teutonia und im Basler Konvent (1388–1510),” *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte* 17 (1998): 67–122. I am grateful to Anne Winston-Allen for supplying informative answers to my questions about the complexities of this movement.

19. Elm, *Reformbemühungen*, 12–13.

20. Williams-Krapp, “Ordensreform und Literatur,” 42; and Regina D. Schiewer, “Sermons for Nuns of the Dominican Observance Movement,” in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Boston: Brill, 1998), 77–8.

21. Eugen Hillenbrand, “Die Observantenbewegung in der deutschen Ordensprovinz der Dominikaner,” in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, ed. Kaspar Elm (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 219–20.

22. Ibid., 219, citing Johannes Meyer, O.P., *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens*, ed. Benedictus Maria Reichert (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1909), 62.

23. Elm, *Reformbemühungen*, 17.

24. For the relationship between the reforms and literary production, see the work of Werner Williams-Krapp (note 5 above); R. Schiewer, “Sermons for Nuns”; Andrea Syring, “*Compilatio* as a Method of Middle High German Literature Production: An Anonymous Sermon about St. John the Evangelist and its Appearance in Other Sermons,” in *Medieval Sermons and Society: Cloister, City, University*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse et al. (Louvain-La-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d’Études Médiévales, 1998), 117–43; and Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “*Uslesen*: Das Weiterwirken mystischen Gedankenguts im Kontext dominikanischer Frauengemeinschaften,” in *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang: Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte; Kolloquium Kloster Fischingen 1998*, ed. Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 581–603.

25. Petrus Becker, “Erstrebte und erreichte Ziele benediktinischer Reformen im Spätmittelalter,” in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, ed. Kaspar Elm (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 25.

26. Ibid: “Die wissenschaftliche Bildung schuf eine Ebene, auf der Bürgerliche und Adlige gleichberechtigt verkehren konnten, eine wichtige Voraussetzung für die Brechung des in vielen Klöstern herrschenden Adelsprivilegs.”

27. Oswald of Wolkenstein, a wealthy nobleman from South Tirol, spent much of his life travelling through Europe and the East and writing songs about his adventures. For a selection of his songs, see Burghart Wachinger, ed., *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Eine Auswahl aus seinen Liedern. Mittelhochdeutsch und Neuhochdeutsch* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1967).

28. For a brief account of the affair, see Wilhelm Baum, “Niklaus von Kues und die Wolkensteiner,” *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 3 (1984–85): 136–39. For a revision of the gender-biased reception of Maria in Cusa scholarship, see Eva Cesutti “*Et clausa est janua*: Maria von Wolkenstein, Nicolaus Cusanus und das ‘richtige’ Klosterleben,” in *Fromme Frauen*, ed. Siglinde Clementi and Cecilia Nubola (Innsbruck/Wien: Studienveslaj, 2004).

29. R. Schiewer, “Sermons for Nuns,” 75: In the fourteenth century in Alsace and Swabia, there were twenty Dominican friaries responsible for the care of sixty-three women’s convents.

30. R. Schiewer, “Sermons for Nuns,” 78: Schiewer takes the Dominican order, where only 10 percent of the houses accepted reform, as exemplary for all the monastic, mendicant, and canonical orders in the fifteenth century. This is not to say that conventuals (those not accepting reform) had no use for books at all. The convent of Töb near Zurich, for example, never embraced reform, but nevertheless had a library and a scriptorium, and was active in the production and exchange of vernacular devotional literature. See Däniker-Gysin, *Geschichte des Dominikanerinnenklosters*, 56–62.

31. Jeffrey Hamburger remarks on the distinct profile of the Observant Dominicans in Germany for example. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 578 n. 9.

32. Christina Meckelnborg, *Die nichtarchivischen Handschriften der Signaturengruppe Best. 701 Nr. 1–190, ergänzt durch die Görres-Gymnasium Koblenz aufbewahrten Handschriften A, B und C*

(Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 259.

33. Meckelnborg, *Die nichtarchivischen Handschriften*, 259–71.

34. For a detailed listing of the contents of S, see Paul-Gerhard Völker, *Die deutschen Schriften des Franziskaners Konrad Bömlein* (Munich: Beck, 1964), 45–51. For information on Konrad Bömlein, see Völker, *Die deutschen Schriften*, 137–54. On the St. Georgener collection, see Karl Rieder, ed., *Der sogenannte St. Georgener Prediger aus der Freiburger und der Karlsruher Handschrift* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1908).

35. Karl Bihlmeyer, “Die schwäbische Mystikerin Elsbeth Achler von Reute (d. 1420) und die Überlieferung ihrer Vita,” in *Festgabe Philipp Strauch zum 80. Geburtstag am 23. September 1932*, ed. Georg Baesecke and Ferdinand Joseph Schneider (Halle: Niemeyer, 1932), 88–109. For a detailed listing of the contents of Ha, see Karin Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Augsburg: Die Signaturengruppen Cod. I.3 und Cod. III. 1*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 264–71.

36. For the contents of M₁, see Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 331–37.

37. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, mqq. 206, f. 103^r. Cited in H.-J. Schiewer, “Uslesen,” 583.

38. Werner Williams-Krapp, “*Dise ding sint dennoch nit ware zeichen der heiligkeit*. Zur Bewertung mystischer Erfahrung im 15. Jahrhundert,” *Lili* 20 (1990): 61–71.

39. Ibid., 64. An edition of the *Sendbrief* is forthcoming: Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Krapp, “Die Dominikaner im Kampf gegen weibliche Irrtümer: Eberhard Mardach’s *Sendbrief von wahrer Andacht* (mit einer Textedition),” in *Deutsch-böhmische Literaturbeziehungen: Germano-Bohemica, Festschrift für Václav Bok zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans-Jochen Behr, I. Lisový, and Werner Williams-Krapp (Hamburg: Kovac, forthcoming 2004). For a similar *Sendbrief*, see idem, “Eine Warnung an alle, dy sich etwaz duncken: Der *Sendbrief vom Betrug teuflicher Erscheinungen* (mit einer Edition),” in *Forschungen zur deutschen Literatur des Spätmittelalters: Festschrift für Johannes Janota*, ed. Horst Brunner and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 167–89.

40. Williams-Krapp, “*Dise ding*,” 64.

41. Jeffrey Hamburger notes a similar attitude toward images that promote ecstatic excess: “In their view [Johannes Meyer and his fellow observants], images, the miracles associated with them, and the visions they inspired were dangerous precisely because they encouraged ‘private’ experience of a kind they could not easily control.” Further, “As Meyer sees it, images have usurped the authority rightfully invested in spiritual advisers such as himself.” Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 431 and 441. Similar issues arose for the sisters of the common life in the Low Countries. Nikolaus Staubach shows that the superiors among the brethren in the community at Windesheim placed limits on “private writing” because of anxieties about spiritual control and the potential communal interest of the product. Brothers were thus not allowed to translate Latin texts without permission from the Prior and they were further prohibited from copying books on philosophy or visions for the sisters. Staubach, “Der Codex als Ware,” 150.

42. Williams-Krapp, “*Dise ding*,” 64 n. 11.

43. Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Zurich: Artemis & Winkler, 1995), 115. I am grateful to Werner Williams-Krapp for pointing out this and other sources on Gerson’s role at the Council. For English translations of Gerson’s selected writings, see Jean Gerson, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, trans. Brian Patrick McGuire, preface by Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1998).

44. Dinzelsbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?*, 115: “Nur der geschulte Fachtheologe hat laut Gerson über die Grenzerfahrungen zu urteilen, auch wenn er solche selbst nicht kennt.” See also Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

45. Williams-Krapp, “*Dise ding*,” 63.

46. J. Meyer, *Buch der Reformacio*, 59.

47. Ibid.

48. Syring, “*Compilatio* as a Method.”

49. See, for example, Heinrich Denifle, “Meister Eckeharts lateinische Schriften, und die Grundschaung seiner Lehre,” *Archiv für Litteratur- und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* 2 (1886): 417–615; Kurt Ruh, *Meister Eckhart: Theologe, Prediger, Mystiker*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 1989), 95–114; Otto Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle Theologie: Zu Meister Eckharts Auseinandersetzung mit der Frauenfrömmigkeit seiner Zeit* (Munich: Artemis, 1987); and with particular and more nuanced focus on the situation of Heinrich Seuse’s *vita* and its relationship to the model of the *Vitaspatrum*. Werner Williams-Krapp, “*Nucleus totius perfectionis*: Die

Altverspiritualität in der *Vita Heinrich Seuses*,” in *Festschrift Walter Haug und Burgh art Wachinger*, ed. Johannes Janota, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), vol. 1, 407–21.

50. While acknowledging that most of the Sisterbooks were composed after Eckhart’s death, Kurt Ruh nevertheless argues that the Sisterbooks accurately reflect the religious life of women around 1300 to which Eckhart would have been responding. Ruh, *Meister Eckhart*, 110. Otto Langer takes this thesis much further in *Mystische Erfahrung*, Part II.

51. Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Susanne Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster. Historische Funktion und rhetorische Legitimation frauenmystischer Texte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999).

52. Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster*, 41–43.

53. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 6.

54. *Ibid.*, 203.

55. On Gerson’s reaction to the fame of Birgitta of Sweden, see Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?*, 115. For a cataloguing of Johannes Meyer’s edits of the Sisterbooks, see Ruth Meyer, *Das St. Katharinentaler Schwesternbuch: Untersuchung, Edition, Kommentar* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), 140–81; and Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 444–51.

56. Williams-Krapp, “Dise ding,” 65.

57. In *Women Writing on Women: Convent Chronicles and the Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming), Anne Winston-Allen assembles and discusses considerable evidence for women composing (i.e., compiling) and producing books in the context of the observance movement. I am grateful to Professor Winston-Allen for sharing drafts of two chapters from this work. None of the manuscripts I deal with here, however, explicitly identifies a female copyist or compiler.

58. J. Meyer, *Buch der reformacio*, 59.

59. Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz Best. 701 Nr. 149. For a detailed listing of contents, see Meckelnborg, *Die nichtarchivischen Handschriften*, 259–71.

60. K, f. 14^r-99^r and 100^r-172^v, which I refer to as Part I and Part II, respectively

61. There are eight sermons in this group, of which four are Eckhartian and one is by Heinrich of Löwen (Leuven) (ca. 1250–1303).

62. Both quotes in K, f. 54^r.

63. For Eckhart’s sermon, see Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and Bernard McGinn, ed. Richard J. Payne (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 199–203.

64. Meckelnborg, *Die nichtarchivischen Handschriften*, 259.

65. In the Einsiedeln manuscript (II, 23), the intermediary is identified as “Love” in the title to the chapter. The Koblenz manuscript transmits no title, however, and the intermediary is unidentified.

66. “durch kusset sy mit synem gotlichen munde . . . Er druotet sy mit voiler maht in den bette der mynnen. So kunt si in daz hoheste wol und in daz mynnenklicheste we” (K, f. 82^{r-v}).

67. As Jeffrey Hamburger argues, “Complete control and *conformitas*, however, remained ineluctable ideals.” Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 431.

68. These numbers are based on the catalogue description by Meckelnborg. My own notes on the manuscript indicate that there are more citations to authorities than are listed in the catalogue *incipits* and *explicitis*. Because the Landeshauptarchiv in Koblenz does not allow the microfilming of complete manuscripts, however, I was unable to make a comprehensive count of citations to authorities.

69. Meckelnborg, *Die nichtarchivischen Handschriften*, 259: “Sprache und Zusammenstellung der Texte, insbesondere deren asketische Ausrichtung, erlauben darüber hinaus die Vermutung, daß die Handschrift in einem reformierten Dominikanerinnenkloster im Zusammenhang mit der Observanzbewegung entstanden ist” [emphasis added] (The language and assortment of texts, in particular their ascetic content, allow the further conjecture that the manuscript originated in a reformed Dominican women’s convent in connection with the observance movement).

70. Although Part II of K is rubricated, there is no table of contents and the scribes of this part at some points fail to indicate when one text ends and another begins. Texts 27 through 32 for example (K, f. 146^v-163^r) appear to be a continuous narrative without initials or breaks. This suggests that the book was more likely to be read continuously from front to back. On the function of book organization markers and their relationship to reading practices, see Nigel F. Palmer, “Kapitel und Buch: Zu den Gliederungsprinzipien mittelalterlicher Bücher,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 23 (1989): 43–88.

71. Württembergische Landesbibliothek Cod. theol. et phil. oct. 27. For the contents, see Paul Gerhard Völker, *Die deutschen Schriften*, 45–51. See also Karl Bihlmeyer, “Der sogenannte St.

Georgener Prediger und ander: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 123 (1942): 79–97. Bihlmeyer describes the first six texts of the manuscript as belonging to *die Tradition der älteren, voreckhartischen Theologie und Mystik, die den Unterweisungen zugrunde liegt* (the tradition of the older, pre-Eckhartian theology and mysticism that underlies the instructions), although he notes the use of an Eckhartian term (*synderisis*) as well (83–84).

72. The 192 folios of this manuscript contain eight short texts on the love of Christ as the soul's bridegroom, the last of which combines three chapters from Mechthild's book (Book I, chapters 1, 9, and 10) (eighteen folios); fifty-five short sermons or sermon excerpts from a popular set of sermons known as the St. Georgener sermon collection (eighty-one folios); four tracts on sin and confession (fifty-nine folios); five prayers (eleven folios); a long sermon on prayer falsely attributed to St. Bernard (thirteen folios); a short tract on suffering (one folio); and part of an anonymous sermon on the Eucharist identified by scholars as Konrad Bömlein's (nine folios). Except for the Bömlein sermon, the codex is written by one hand. Aside from citations to Church fathers who lived no later than the twelfth century, there are no authorial attributions in this manuscript.

73. For this reading of Johannes Nider, see John Dahmus, "Preaching to the Laity in Fifteenth-Century Germany: Johannes Nider's *Harps*," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983): 55–68.

74. Nider used the *Conlationes* XXIII of John Cassian (d. c. 435) as his source. Dahmus, "Preaching to the Laity," 57. See also Eugen Hillenbrand, "Johannes Nider," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd ed., ed. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), vol. 6, 973; and on the transmission and readership of the *Harps*, see Margit Brand, *Studien zu Johannes Niders Deutschen Schriften* (Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1998), 107–15.

75. *durch bete und liebe ersamer burgerin da selbst, in ein teütsch buoch ordenlich ze samen geschriben* (24 *Harps*, f. 4r; at the request and for love of the honorable women there, compiled together in a German book in an orderly fashion), cited in Dahmus, "Preaching to the Laity," 59 n. 19. Dahmus suggests the translation of *burgerin* in the plural rather than the singular because of the context. He also notes that the audience the sermons conspicuously leave out is the lower class (58–61).

76. Dahmus, "Preaching to the Laity," 61. See also my discussion of the Colmar manuscript in Chapter 3.

77. Bihlmeyer notes that the text immediately following the Mechthild selection (S, f. 18^v–20^v) discusses the six uses of serving at the altar, a task normally limited to males. Also in the text is a statement that swearing and shameful words should never be heard from *gottes knaechten* (S, f. 19^v; God's serving boys). Bihlmeyer, "Der sogenannte St. Georgener Prediger," 85.

78. The analogy of the clucking hen also appears in the Middle English *Ancrene Wisse* (ca. 1220), indicating that it must have been a conventional image. See Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *Anchore's Spirituality and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

79. Karl Rieder, ed., *Der sogenannte St. Georgener Prediger*, 138–39.

80. "Die da brinnen in der waren minne und uf einen grunt gebuwet der warheit und frucht bringet mit vollem huffen des seligen endes, die wonent in der hoehin" (S, f. 18^v).

81. Bihlmeyer, "Der sogenannte St. Georgener Prediger," 81.

82. Völker, "Die deutschen Schriften," 45 and 140.

83. Bihlmeyer, "Der sogenannte St. Georgener Prediger," 81.

84. Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek III. 1. 4^o 8. See Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 264–71. For the critical edition of Peunter's text, see Bernhard Schnell, ed., *Thomas Peuntner "Büchlein von der Liebhabung Gottes"* (Munich: Artemis, 1984).

85. Following Peuntner's text are a sermon and a letter by Johannes Nider, excerpts from a text identified as David of Augsburg's tract on how to be a good novice in a convent, numerous anonymous allegorical tracts (on the four cardinal virtues, on a spiritual convent, on the soul as a city), two short collections of sayings, a text about a laywoman who is more devout than the teacher she asks for assistance, the Mechthild chapters, a text on the golden rule, a prayer to the Virgin Mary, a Latin collection of sayings attributed to St. Bernard, the Life of Elsbeth Achler of Reute attributed by scholars to Konrad Küglin, and a spiritual dialogue between a princess and a lady merchant. The manuscript also has twenty-seven ink outline drawings of initials in various colors and involving figures of birds, dragons, snakes, people (a woman with an imperial orb, a man, and a merchant), and a vase of flowers.

86. Ha, f. 1^r–135^r; 142^r–179^v; 229^r–234^v; 353^r–403^v; 236^v–244^r, respectively.

87. The text here is quoted from the edition of the *Büchlein* and the accompanying letter in Schnell, ed., *Thomas Peuntner*, 282.

88. *Ibid.*, 284.

89. This letter is excerpted and translated into modern German in Wilhelm Oehl, ed., *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe des Mittelalters 1100–1550* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1931), 515.

For Oehl's commentary on Nider's correspondence, see pages 506–7. For the sermon on marriage, based on a different manuscript with only slight variations, see Joseph Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (Bonn: Carl Georgi Universitäts-Buchdruckerei und Verlag, 1901), 437–44.

90. Ha, f. 229^r-234^v. See also Kurt Ruh, "Das Frauchen von 22 (21) Jahren," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al., 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 2, 858–60. On the popularity of this motif in fifteenth-century Germany, see F. P. Pickering, "Notes on Late Medieval German Tales in Praise of *Docta Ignorantia*," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester* 24.1 (1940): 121–37. On the Sister Katherine Treatise, see Franz-Josef Schweitzer, *Der Freiheitsbegriff der deutschen Mystik: Seine Beziehung zur Ketzerei der "Brüder und Schwestern vom Freien Geist," mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den pseudoeckhartischen Traktat "Schwester Katrei"* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1981); and Barbara Newman, "Excursus 2: Gnostics, Free Spirits, and 'Meister Eckhart's Daughter,'" in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, ed. Barbara Newman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 172–81. For an English translation, see Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart Teacher and Preacher*, trans. Bernard McGinn with the collaboration of Frank Tobin and Elvira Borgstadt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 349–87.

91. Schnell, *Thomas Peuntner*, 171.

92. *Ibid.*, 171 and n. 2. Arnold Schromm speculates that Agnes had the books made specifically for use in the convent. Arnold Schromm, *Die Bibliothek des ehemaligen Zisterzienserinnenklosters Kirchheim am Ries: Buchpflege und geistiges Leben in einem schwäbischen Frauenstift* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 48–49.

93. Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek III. 1. 2° 13, III. 1. 2° 32, and III. 1. 4° 17. See Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 706.

94. On the history of the convent at Kirchheim, see Schromm, *Die Bibliothek*, 65–76.

95. Magdalena led the community until 1496 and died in 1502. The manuscripts remained in the convent at Kirchheim until it was dissolved in 1803, at which point the library became part of the Fürstlich Oettingen-Wallerstein'sche Bibliothek (Royal Library of Oettingen and Wallerstein). Schnell, *Thomas Peuntner*, 171; and Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 10. Magdalena had at least three other books as well: two other devotional books and a copy of John Mandeville's travels. This manuscript was most likely originally acquired by her father, Count Ludwig XI of Oettingen, whose book lists mention the Mandeville codex. Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek I. 3. 4° 8, see Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 93.

96. Schromm quotes a report from the *Hausbuch* (housebook) of the neighboring Maihingen convent about Magdalena's embrace of the *Observanz* and the resistance she faced from some of her nuns. Schromm, *Die Bibliothek*, 86–87. On the relationship between the books Agnes left her daughter and the reform, see pages 95–97.

97. Wolfram Sexauer argues that "Die Kartausen-Bibliothek stellt—besonders in der ersten Aufbauphase—zunächst immer ein Spiegelbild der Leseinteressen der örtlichen Umgebung dar, nicht der Mönche" (The Carthusian libraries represent in the first place—especially in the initial building phase—a reflection of the reading interests of the surrounding area, not of the monks). Wolfram D. Sexauer, *Frühneuhochdeutsche Schriften in Kartäuser Bibliotheken: Untersuchungen zur Pflege der volkssprachlichen Literatur in Kartäuserklöstern des oberdeutschen Raums bis zum Einsetzen der Reformation* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1978), 47.

98. Sexauer, *Frühneuhochdeutsche Schriften*, 49, quoting Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, cgm. 4590, f. 13^{r-v}.

99. On the history of the rosary and rosary texts in the vernacular, see Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

100. Friedrich Schmidt, "Geistliches Gespräch zwischen einer Fürstin und einer Krämerin von einem Paternoster aus Edelsteinen," *Alemannia* 26 (1898): 193–200; see also Schnell, *Thomas Peuntner*, 171–72.

101. Philipp Strauch, *Pfalzgraefen Mechthild in ihren litterarischen Beziehungen: Ein Bild aus der schwäbischen Literaturgeschichte des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1883), 3. For a more recent account of Mechthild's place and reputation in literary history, see the excellent essay by Alfred Karnein, "Mechthild von der Pfalz as Patroness: Aspects of Female Patronage in the Early Renaissance," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 22 (1995): 141–70.

102. This is the relationship described by Sexauer, *Frühneuhochdeutsche Schriften*, 98 n. 2; Schnell claims that Johann was Agnes's uncle, not her brother, *Thomas Peuntner*, 173 n. 10. Both cite the same source: Christoph Friedrich von Stalin, *Wirtembergische Geschichte: Dritter Teil. Schwaben*

und Südfranken. *Schluß des Mittelalters*. 1269–14.96, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856), vol. 3, 689. Stälin gives a genealogical chart for the Werdenberg counts that shows a Johann married to Elisabeth, daughter of Eberhard, Count of Wirtemberg. But Agnes does not appear on the chart nor is she mentioned in the text so it is difficult to say how she is related to anyone. However, whether she was a cousin or an aunt to the young Elisabeth is beside the point. What is significant for my argument here is that Agnes was of the Werdenberg family, and that there was a relationship established between the Werdenbergs and the Wirtembergs through Johann's marriage.

103. Schnell, *Thomas Peuntner*, 171.

104. It is unclear whether Johannes K, the scribe of Ha, made these selections and changes himself or whether he copied them from a source in which they had already been made.

105. Although the Einsiedeln manuscript was not the source for Ha, it clearly represents a version of Mechthild's book that predates the writing of Ha and that is closer to the book that Mechthild wrote and wished to be disseminated.

106. The compiler's title is similar to that in E (*Von siben hande minne*), but is also reminiscent of Beatrice of Nazareth's text, *Seven manieren van minne*. Considering how texts were transmitted in such fragmentary and anonymous ways in this tradition, however, the confusion of two different vernacular mystical treatises on love is not surprising. In this case, the title in the Ha manuscript is followed by a short poem-like text of five or so lines (taken from a much longer chapter in the E version) describing seven types of love (faithful love, desiring love, seeking love, and so on). It bears no resemblance to Beatrice's treatise.

107. Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. III. I. 4^o 34; for the contents list, see Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 331–37.

108. Ha, f. 242^r-244^r; M₁, f. 306^r-v. The *hymelfart* text in M₁ is incomplete.

109. Bernhard Schnell, "Ein neues Exzerpt aus dem *Fliessenden Licht der Gottheit* der Mechthild von Magdeburg," *ZfdA* 110 (1981): 273.

110. See Appendix A.

111. Mü3, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek cgm. 172:

Wer ditz Buechel lesen wil. / den sol des niht duonken vil. / Daz er fuer den schriber got. / bit. daz er im owz aller not. / Hefte. An sele vnd an libe. / vnd den poesen geist vertribe. / Von im an sinem ende. / daz er on missewende. / Besitze barmhertzlichich. / mit got daz ewig himelrich. / Bruder Engelhart genant. / in Eberach ist er bekant (Mü3, f. 71r)

Whoever wants to read this little book, he should think nothing of praying to God on behalf of the scribe that He will help him escape all distress in soul and in body and drive away the evil spirit from him unto his dying day and that he will, without a misstep, mercifully possess with God eternal heaven. Bruder Engelhart he is called. In Eberach is he known.

For a very brief description of the manuscript, see Erich Petzet, *Die deutschen Pergament-Handschriften 1–200 der Staatsbibliothek in München* (Munich: Palmischen Buchhandlung, 1920), 312. Although scholars now agree that Engelhart was not the “author” of this compilation, they usually refer to it as the *Ebracher Spruchsammlung* (the Ebrach compilation). I will also follow this practice hereafter.

112. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 1, xiv–xix.

113. I discuss this discovery in more detail in Sara S. Poor, “Gender und Autorität in der Konstruktion einer schriftlichen Tradition,” in *Autorität der/in Sprache, Literatur, neuen Medien*, ed. Jürgen Fohrmann, Ingrid Kasten, and Eva Neuland (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1999), 544–52. Neumann was aware of two of the Munich manuscripts (Cgm. 116 and 172); he mentions them in a footnote in an article on the Karlsruhe manuscript (Ka). Hans Neumann, “Ein ungedrucktes Mechthild-Fragment aus der Karlsruher Handschrift St. Georgen Nr. 78, mit einem Exkurs über die Stellung der Komparative in mhd. Korrelativsätzen,” in *Festgabe für Ulrich Pretzel*, ed. Werner Simon, Wolfgang Bachofer, and Wolfgang Dittmann (Berlin: Schmidt, 1963), 318 n. 5. However, Neumann felt that they belonged more to the *Spruchsammlung* tradition than to the Mechthild transmission. As such, they were too far removed from the Einsiedeln manuscript to be useful in his efforts to construct a critical edition that was as close as possible to Mechthild’s original writings. Presumably, it was for these reasons that he chose not to include them in his manuscript list.

114. Erich Petzet dates Mü2 (Cgm. 116) to the fifteenth century. Petzet, *Die deutschen Pergament-Handschriften*, 205. However, it is my view that the booklet was produced in the fourteenth century like the other parchment compilations — indeed, the bold textura script used in Cgm. 116 (Mü2) is indicative of an earlier period — but that it was not bound until the fifteenth century after which point the ownership mark (*Gots haus ze Tegernsee*) and date (1484) were added and the two fifteenth century woodcuts were glued onto the frontispiece and back cover. Usage marks on the parchment and the loss of several leaves at the back of the manuscript would also support the view that the booklet was used unbound for a significant length of time.

115. Mü2 represents the most complete version of the *Spruchsammlung* and adds a number of prayers at the end of the collection. Mü3 contains the same number of sayings, except that one was crossed out, presumably because of its perceived heretical content. H breaks off after the 158th text, but adds an Eckhart sermon as the second text. Mü begins with the thirtieth saying, having lost two quires before being bound, and makes some other minor additions and deletions. Adolf Spamer, “Über die Zersetzung und Vererbung in den deutschen Mystikertexten” (Dissertation, University of Gießen, 1910), 53 n. 3.

116. The last part of the manuscript bears a scribal dating of 1442 (Ka, f. 243v). Theodor Längin, *Die Handschriften der Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe: Deutsche Handschriften. Neudruck mit bibliographischen Nachtragen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 40. According to Picard’s unpublished notes on this manuscript, which the librarian in the reading room at the Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe kindly showed me, watermarks on the paper from all four parts date to between 1442 and 1444. Furthermore, a watermark in the leaf used for the binding dates to 1444–1446. Picard thus concludes that the parts were bound together soon after completion, which in turn suggests that the four parts were being worked on at the same time, conceivably at the behest of someone who wanted a multipurpose devotional handbook.

Part I is a collection of Eckhartian teachings and associated sermons, Part II contains the Ebrach *Spruchsammlung*, Part III contains another set of sermons, and Part IV contains a Pater Noster exegesis. The *Spruchsammlung* is missing the same text that is scratched out in Mü3 as well as one other text. Spamer, “Über die Zersetzung,” 53–54 n. 3.

117. For the details of the contents, see Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 321–

- 31.
118. Like Ka, it consists of sermons by Eckhart and Tauler, mystical dialogues, a Pater Noster exegesis, and more sayings.
119. Mü4, f. 127^{vb}–128^{rb}: For a listing of the contents, see Karin Schneider, *Die deutschen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München (Cgm. 351–500)*, part 5, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1970), 192–99.
120. Jerome names himself twice:

Quis hoc scribebat Joranimus Muller nomen habebat. (Mü4, f. 48^{vb})

He who wrote this had the name Jerome Miller.

Wunschent all *haill* dem schreiber ze *tail* das seiner sel werde *rat* der dis puoch geschriben *hat* ist genant Jeronimus Mueller daz puch ist geschriben worden nach crist gepuret m° vnd iiii vnd xxxvi iar das puch ward us geschriben an sant valentinus abent da was ich treizechen iar alt / werr es les oder werr es her lesen der pett mir ain aue maria oder ain pater noster [emphasis added]. (Mü4, f. 193^{ra}).

Wish all health to the scribe for his part that his soul will be counseled. He who wrote this book is named Jerome Miller. The book was written after the birth of Christ one thousand four hundred and thirty-six years. The book was finished on St. Valentine's eve. I turned thirteen years old on that day. Whoever reads it or whoever reads it hereafter, he should say a Hail Mary for me or an Our Father.

121. On the same page as the Latin scribal comment and, like that comment, outlined in a box, Jerome writes: "horent lieb fraw mecz dicz geplecz es ist suess geschmecz" (Mü4, f. 48^{vb}; Listen Lady Metz [short for Mechthild], to this noise, it is a sweet/musical sound). An almost identical comment follows the request for prayers on folio 193^r.

122. Schneider, *Deutsche mittelalterliche Handschriften*, 716.

123. Karin Schneider, *Die deutschen Handschriften*, 454, listing thirteen manuscripts; Karin Schneider, *Die deutschen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München (Cgm. 691–867)* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1984), part 5, vol. 5, 723, listing nine manuscripts.

124. Längin, *Die Handschriften der Badischen Landesbibliothek*, 38; Gustav Scherrer, *Verzeichniss der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek von St. Gallen* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1975).

125. Spamer, "Über die Zersetzung," 53–54 n. 3. The relevant manuscript signatures are for Berlin Mgo. 65 and 378, and for Basel, A XI 59 and B IX 15.

126. This chapter, including this saying, appears in manuscripts E, C, and W. As such, we can be reasonably confident that the use of this saying was Mechthild's choice and not an addition of a later scribe.

Chapter 5

1. Johann Frawenlob, *Kurtze/ historische Beschreibung/ der fuernembsten gelehrten/ verständigen und kunsterfahren Weibspersonen/ die in der Welt bis auff diese Zeit gelebet haben. Auß vnterschiedlichen glaubwürdigen Historicis; so wohl auch eigenen Erfahrung/ zusammen getragen/ nach dem Alphabet mit Fleiß verzeichnet/ vnd Männiglich zur Nachrichtung/ in Druck gegeben/* (Die lobwürdige Gesellschaft der Gelehrten Weiber, 1631) (microfilm), 24–25.

2. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 196.

3. I borrow this phrase from John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

4. See Appendix A.

5. Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 33–34.

6. Wilhelm Oehl, "Neu entdeckte Mystikertexte: Elisabeth von Schönau und Mechthild von

Magdeburg,” *ZfdA* 64 (1927–81: Emil Spiess, *Ein Zeuge mittelalterlicher Mystik in der Schweiz* (St. Gallen: Weder rorschach, 1935). See also Elke Senne, “Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit Mechthilds von Magdeburg: Die Fassung der sogenannten Wolhusener Handschrift, Text und Untersuchung” (Dissertation, University of Munich, 2002).

7. Oehl, “Neu entdeckte Mystikertexte,” 278–79.

8. *Ibid.*, 279.

9. See Chapter 3.

10. Rb, f. 92^{ra}-93^{vb}, “Incipit uita sancte Christine cognomento mirabilis [in a later hand]: quam composuit frater Thomas de cantiprato nacione Brabantinus.” Gustav Meyer and Max Burckhardt, *Die mittelalterlichen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Basel: Beschreibendes Verzeichnis, Abteilung B. Theologische Pergamenthandschriften*, vol. 2, Signaturen B VIII 11-B XI 26 (Basel: Verlag der Universitätsbibliothek, 1966), 180.

11. Ra, f. 99^r, Mechthild’s text is announced as follows: “Incipiunt Capitula in librum qui dicitur lux diuinitatis editus a quadam sancta puella virgine Mechthildis nomine per diuinam gratiam inspiratam sed per fratrem heinricum collectum” ([Here] begin the chapters of the book that is called *Light of Divinity*, brought forth/published by a certain holy virgin girl by the name of Mechthild [who was] inspired by divine grace, but collected by brother Heinrich). The title for the life of Christina that appears in Ra is the same as that in Rb except it does not have the identification of Thomas of Cantimpré as the author. Unpublished catalogue description to Basel, A VIII 6, 2–3. I am indebted to the librarians at the Universitätsbibliothek Basel for supplying me with a copy of this description.

12. The cataloguers speculate that the scribe felt he had two varying sources of the same text, for he writes: “Sequuntur plura alia capitula eiusdem libri intytulati lux diuinitatis non scripta in exemplari quod solum fuit excerptum tocius libri” (Many other chapters of the same book entitled *Light of Divinity* follow, which were not written in the exemplar, which was only an excerpt of the whole book). Meyer and Burckhardt, *Die mittelalterlichen Handschriften*, 179.

13. Senne, “Das Fließende Licht,” 36.

14. Oehl, “Neu entdeckte Mystikertexte,” 279. The Stanford University Rare Book Room owns a first-edition imprint of this book. Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (Jacobus Faber Stapulensis), *Liber trium virorum & trium spiritualium virginum* (Paris: Henrici Stephani, 1513).

15. The book is addressed to a nun called Adelaide, the “spiritual mother” (abbess) of a monastery dedicated to St. Hildegard—perhaps the monastery Hildegard herself founded, Rupertsberg—and also to a Church official (D[omini?] Machardo of Hatstein, primate of the Church of Mainz). Lefèvre, *Liber trium*, f. 1^v and 2^v.

16. Lefèvre’s book consists of Hermas (1^r–17^r), Vgvetini Monachi (17^r–19^r), Brother Robert (19^r–27^v), Hildegard’s *Scivias* (28^r–118^v), Elisabeth of Schönau (119^r–150^r), and Mechthild of Hackeborn (150^v–190^v).

17. See Spiess, *Ein Zeuge*, 56. Unfortunately, I was unable to view Rw in person, which is now being held in the Romero Haus of the Zentralbibliothek in Luzern. For a detailed description of the manuscript, see Elke Senne, “Das Fließende Licht,” 26–48. Although Senne has undertaken a comparison of Mechthild’s book as it appears in Rw with the Latin version in Rb, a substantive comparison of the Elisabeth selections in Rw with their source in Lefèvre’s book has yet to be done.

In an era when printing was in its infancy and both media existed simultaneously, the seemingly reverse relationship between Lefèvre’s book and Rw (i.e., print to manuscript) was not uncommon. As Seth Lerer suggests in a recent essay, “early printed books were rarely distinguished from handmade documents. The typefaces of books made in the first half-century of printing are themselves modeled on manuscript hands.” Seth Lerer, “Histories of Reading,” *Raritan* 20 (2000): no. See also, for example, Hans Lülling, “Die Fortdauer der handschriftlichen Buchherstellung nach der Erfindung des Buchdrucks — ein buchgeschichtliches Problem,” in *Buch und Text im 15. Jahrhundert/ Book and Text in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and Helmar Härtel (Hamburg: Hauswedell & Co, 1981), 17–27; and N. F. Blake, “Manuscript to Print,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 403–19.

18. Paul Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz: Zweiter Band, Bistum Mainz Erfurt* (Munich: Beck, 1928), vol. 2, 432. See also Senne, “Das Fließende Licht,” 36 n. 116.

19. Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, vol. 2, 430–34.

20. Senne, “Das Fließende Licht,” 37 n. 118, citing Klaus Reinhardt, “Erfahrung und Theologie der Liebe Gottes: Die Auslegung des Hohenliedes bei Teresa von Avila und Jerónimo Gracían,” in *Von der Suche nach Gott: Helmut Riedlinger zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Margot Schmidt and Fernando Dominguez Reboiras (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1998), 114–15.

21. According to Spiess, the page numbers, chapter titles, beginnings and endings of texts, and initials are written in red ink, and, in the second half of the manuscript, the beginnings of sentences are also marked with red slashes. This use of red ink indicates that the manuscript would have been used for reading in front of a monastic community. Spiess, *Ein Zeuge*, 33. Senne notes the presence of Latin words written above certain German ones and suggests that *Rw* was intended as a translation aid. Senne, “Das *Fließende Licht*,” 35–36.

22. We can trace this prophetic Mechthild back to the Latin transmission. The passages from Mechthild’s book paraphrased by Frawenlob illustrate her prophetic talents specifically in relation to her visions about the role of the Dominican order in ecclesiastical reform (Prologue; VI, 21; and possibly also IV, 27). Frawenlob indicates that the prophecies he cites come from a printed edition “with other rhymes:” *Mechtildis, . . . , Hat unter andern eine Prophecey hinder jhr verlassen/ (welche sampt andern Reyemen gedruckt ist) in welcher. . .* (Mechthild left behind among others a prophecy (which is printed together with other rhymes) in which . . .). Johann Frawenlob, “Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft der Gelehrten Weiber, 1631/1633,” in *Eva, Gottes Meisterwerk*, ed. Elisabeth Gössmann (Munich: Iudicium, 1985), 74. Hans Neumann believed that the printed book referred to here was a sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century edition of the *Lux divinitatis*, although no such edition has yet been found. Margot Schmidt, “die *spilende minnevluot*: Der Eros als Sein und Wirkkraft in der Trinität bei Mechthild von Magdeburg,” in “Eine Höhe über die nichts geht”: *Spezielle Glaubenserfahrung in der Frauenmystik?*, ed. Margot Schmidt and Dieter R. Bauer (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1986), 82 n. 34.

23. On the *Querelle* in Germany, see the early volumes of the *Archiv für Philosophie- und Theologiegeschichte der Frauenforschung*. Although a debate reminiscent of the French *Querelle* is not evident in Germany until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gender was very much in debate in the German Middle Ages, particularly in late medieval German literature like the *Minnereden* (discourses on love) and *Mären* (short tales). See Ann Marie Rasmussen, “Thinking Through Gender in Late Medieval German Literature,” in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 97–111.

24. Frawenlob, “Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft,” 46.

25. “Eine heilige Jungfraw/ ist nicht allein trefflich gelehrt/ sondern auch mit einem Prophetischen Geist begabet gewesen.” Frawenlob, “Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft,” 74–75.

26. The name should *not* be confused with a predecessor in the praise of women—Heinrich of Meissen (called Frauenlob, d. 1318), a Minnesinger who wrote Minne-songs, religious lays and didactic poetry. Frawenlob, “Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft,” 46–47. Rather, the compiler/author of the pamphlet most likely took the name Frawenlob in homage to the earlier poet.

27. “Es hat Gott auch ihrer vielen ein schönes fehiges Ingenium verliehen/ und solche zum Studieren tüchtig gemacht/ daß sie gelehrte und berühmte Leute sind worden.” Frawenlob, “Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft,” 50.

28. “Wenn solche in der Jugend fleissig unterrichtet und zum Studieren angehalten würden/ manches Weibsbilde wol so gelehrt/ als manche Mansperson/ werden solte.” Frawenlob, “Die Lobwürdige Gesellschaft,” 50.

29. *Ibid.*, 52.

30. Though never officially canonized, Mechthild of Hackeborn is reported to have been quite famous for her visions by the time of her death and was thought of as a saint soon thereafter. Unlike Gertrud the Great, however, Mechthild of Hackeborn’s life never makes it into late medieval legends. Modern encyclopedias of saints, however, list her feast day as November 19 (the date of her death). See, for example, Hiltgart L. Keller, *Reclams Lexikon der Heiligen und der biblischen Gestalten*, 7th ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), 427; and Peter Dinzlacher, ed., *Wörterbuch der Mystik* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1989), 348. See also Margot Schmidt, “Mechthild von Hackeborn,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al., 2nd ed (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), vol. 6, 252. Evidence for Mechthild’s veneration is found as far off as York in England, where in 1495 Cicely, the duchess of York and mother of Richard III, left a *boke of sainte Matilde* (along with a life of Catherine of Siena and the *Legenda Aurea*) to her granddaughter Bridget, a Dominican nun. Also in York a few years earlier (1491), Thomas Symson, a secular priest, left *j. librum Revelatione Beate Matilde* to a fellow priest. Mary Jeremy Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 56.

31. M. Schmidt, “Mechthild von Hackeborn,” 251.

32. Gertrud’s authorship has not been definitively proven, however. See Margaret Hubrath, “The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns,” *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 11 (1999): 239 n. 15; and Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum: Zur*

Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), 126.

The only edition of Mechthild of Hackeborn's book in Latin is still Solesmes Monks (Louis Paquelin), ed., *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, 2 vols. (Poitiers and Paris: Oudin, 1875–77). For an early German translation, see J. Müller, ed., *Leben und Offenbarungen der heiligen Mechthildis und der schwester Mechthildis (von Magdeburg)*, 2 vols. (Regensburg: Georg Joseph Manz, 1880). The *Liber specialis gratiae* is also excerpted in a modern German translation by Johanna Lanczkowski, ed., *Erhebe dich, meine Seele: Mystische Texte des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: reclam, 1988), 111–33. Margarete Hubrath (TU Chemnitz) and Elke Senne (University of Munich) are currently working on a new critical Latin edition. There is as yet no English translation available.

33. M. Schmidt, "Mechthild von Hackeborn," 252–53.

34. Ibid., 256–57. For a detailed account of the English reception, specifically the excerpting of Mechthild of Hackeborn's book in English devotional compilations, see Rosalynn Voaden, "The Company She Keeps: Mechthild of Hackeborn in Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 51–69.

35. Margot Schmidt lists printed editions of the Latin *Liber specialis gratiae* (sometimes also called *Liber spiritualis gratiae*) from Leipzig in 1510, Paris in 1513 (the Lefèvre anthology), Venice in 1520 and 1522, Cologne in 1536, and Venice in 1558. Early print editions of the German translation date to 1503, 1505, 1507, 1597, and 1657. M. Schmidt, "Mechthild von Hackeborn," 253 and 257.

36. Content and style certainly must also have played a part in Mechthild of Hackeborn's greater popularity. Compare the contrast between Mechthild of Magdeburg and Mechthild of Hackeborn with that between Hildegard and Elisabeth of Schönau. Barbara Newman speculates that the difference in their popularity in the Middle Ages (Elisabeth's works are much more widely circulated than Hildegard's) can be attributed to Elisabeth's close relationship with her community, her role as a mouthpiece for them, and her ability to confirm their profoundest convictions and faith. Barbara Newman, "Preface," in Elisabeth of Schönau, *The Complete Works*, xi–xii. It is likely that Mechthild of Hackeborn was popular for similar reasons, having lived in the convent at Helfta since she was a girl. Bernard McGinn attributes the more "restricted circulation" of Mechthild of Magdeburg's writings to their originality, which is to say to their uniqueness and singularity in relation to the equally unique conditions of their genesis. Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 223 and 427 n. 131, citing Wolfgang Mohr, "Darbietungsformen der Mystik bei Mechthild von Magdeburg," in *Märchen, Mythos, Dichtung: Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag Friedrich von der Leyens*, ed. Hugo Kuhn and Kurt Schier (Munich: Beck, 1963), 375.

37. Johannes Pasch and Johannes Andreas Planer, "Gynaeceum doctum sive. Dissertatio historico-literaria. Vom gelehrten Frauenzimmer 1686/1701," in *Eva, Gottes Meisterwerk*, ed. Elisabeth Gössmann (Munich: Iudicium, 1985), 112, 122, 111, and 117, respectively.

38. Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta*, 11–13.

39. M. Schmidt, "Mechthild von Hackeborn," 251; Johanna Lanczkowski, "Mechthild von Hackeborn," in *Wörterbuch der Mystik*, ed. Peter Dinzelsbacher (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1989), 348. Alexandra Barrati, "Introduction," in Gertrud the Great of Helfta, *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness: Books One and Two*, trans. Alexandra Barrati (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 10.

40. Pasch and Planer, "Gynaeceum doctum sive," 111.

41. Ibid., 111. For the Latin edition of Gertrud's writings, see Solesmes Monks, *Revelationes*. For a modern German translation, see Gertrud die Grosse von Helfta, *Gesandter der Göttlichen Liebe (Legatus divinae pietatis)*, trans. Johanna Lanczkowski (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1989). In addition to Barratt's English edition, see Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Margaret Winkworth (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

42. Pasch and Planer, "Gynaeceum doctum sive," 117.

43. Magnus Daniel Omeis and Christoph Christian Haendel, "Dissertatio de eruditiss Germaniae mulieribus 1688," in *Eva, Gottes Meisterwerk*, ed. Elisabeth Gössmann (Munich: Iudicium, 1985), 137.

44. Christian Franz Paullini, "Zeit-kürzende Erbauliche Lust. 1695. Philosophischer Peyerabend. 1700. Das Hoch- und Wohl-gelahrte Teutsche Frauenzimmer. 1705 (1712)," in *Eva, Gottes Meisterwerk*, ed. Elisabeth Gössmann (Munich: Iudicium, 1985), 180–83.

45. Ibid., 184.

46. Ibid., 180. Wilhelm Friess also printed Mechthild of Hackeborn's revelations in German in 1657. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *Das Buch der geistlichen Gnaden vnd Offenbarungen der heiligen*

Jungfrauen Mechtildis/ des heiligen Benedicti Ordens im Kloster Helpeda bey Eisleben leiblicher Schwester der heiligen Gertrudis Abdissin (Cologne: Wilhelm Friess, 1657). A copy of this edition is owned by Duke University in the Jantz Collection.

47. See the list of print editions in the bibliography of Gertrud die Grosse von Helfta, *Gesandter der Göttlichen Liebe*, 593–94.

48. Title page from *Ein neues guldnes Bettbuech S. Mechtildis* by Mechthild of Hackeborn (Jantz PrB #143) located in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. The Duke catalogue attributes this book to Mechthild of Magdeburg, but I think it more likely a compilation derived from the Gertrud the Great and Mechthild of Hackeborn traditions, as the following quote from Anna Bergin's (the printer) *Dedicano* suggests: the book was assembled and compiled *durch andechtige geistliche Closterjunnckfrauen / mit allem fleiß auß den Offenbarungen/Betrachtungen und Gebetten der h. Unnd Gottgeliebten Junckfrauen Mechtildis / und anderen Geistlichen Buechlein* (by devout, spiritual nuns / with great industriousness from the revelations, observations and prayers of the holy virgin Mechthild, beloved by God, and other spiritual booklets). I was able to make only a cursory study of the book, however, and could not confirm Bergin's sources. More research is clearly needed.

49. R. P. Martino Cochem, *Geistlicher Baum: Oder Bluemen-Garten/Allwo die Liebende in dem Gelieben/ vnd die Seele in dem Seeligmacher / sich zum liebseeligsten zuerfrewen hat. Auch S. Gertrudi vnd Mechtildis Gebettbuech. Fuer das hoch-adelige Frawen-Zimmer* (Munich: Johann Jaecklin, 1690).

50. Johannes Tauler, *D. Ioannis Thauleri clarissimi theologi Piissimae tarn de tempore quam de Sanctis homilie, opera que . . .* (Cologne: Ioannes Quentel, 1553). According to the catalogue entry for this book, only the sermons can be attributed to Tauler. The book also contains a sermon by Meister Eckhart and a letter of Heinrich Seuse's. Both of these additional authors are listed in the table of contents. See also Johannes Tauler, *Sermon des gross gelarten in gnaden erlauchten Doctoris Johannis Thauleri Predigerr Ordens: weisende auff den nehesten waren wegk: yn Geiste czu wandern durch vberschwebenden syn . . .* (Leipzig: Konrad Kacheloven, 1498). This book contains a history of Tauler's life attributed to Tauler himself, but which was actually written by Rulman Merswin.

51. Mechthild of Hackeborn kept her visions to herself until she was fifty years old (1291). During this year, she became severely ill and was confined to her bed. It was only after she was restricted to the sickbed (where she stayed until her death seven years later) that she began to tell her sisters about her visions. Her sisters then began recording Mechthild's visions without her knowledge. M. Schmidt, "Mechthild von Hackeborn," 252.

52. Carl Greith, *Die deutsche Mystik im Prediger-Orden (von 1250–1350); nach ihren Grundlehren, Liedern und Lebensbildern, aus handschriftlichen Quellen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1861/1965), 21; and Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995), 16–21.

53. For an analysis of the association of this desire with the foundation of *Germanistik* as a university discipline, see e.g., Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Un souffle d'Allemagne ayant passé: Friedrich Diez, Gaston Paris, and the Genesis of National Philologies," *Romance Philology* 40.1 (1986): 1–37; and Jeffrey Peck, "'In the Beginning Was the Word': Germany and the Origins of German Studies," in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen Nichols (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 127–47.

54. Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechthild of Magdeburg oder das fliessende Licht der Gottheit, aus der einzigen Handschrift des Stiftes Einsiedeln*, ed. P. Gall Morel (Regensburg: Georg Josef Manz Verlag, 1869), xxi. See also Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 25.

55. Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechthild*, xvii.

56. Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 26.

57. Wilhelm Preger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter nach den Quellen untersucht und dargestellt*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Aalen, 1874–93), vol. 1, 6. The English translation is Tobin's, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 27.

58. Preger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik*, vol. 1, 9.

59. Ibid., vol. 1, 108. See also Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 29.

60. Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg*, 30–31.

61. Ibid., 32–35.

62. For example, see Edvard Lehmann, *Mystik in Heidentum und Christentum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1923), 83 and 88, who argues that the women of the Rhine and the Netherlands transformed mysticism from a matter of thought to a matter of the heart and that Mechthild was the most significant of these women. But they and the lay brothers who were also active in the thirteenth century become

“background” for *die drei großen Meister* (the three great Masters), Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse.

63. Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Deutsche Mystik zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Einheit und Wandlung ihrer Erscheinungsformen*, 3rd expanded ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 67.

64. *Die Spekulative Mystik als notwendige Ergänzung und Unterbauung der Frauenmystik* [emphasis added]. Ibid., xiii.

65. Ibid., 88: The full Wentzlaff-Eggebert quote reads as follows: “Dabei wird die Mystik wieder zum Ausdruck einer reinen Frömmigkeit, wie sie uns ursprünglich bei Hildegard und Mechthild begegnete” (In this way mysticism becomes once again an expression of pure piety, as we originally encountered with Hildegard and Mechthild).

66. To explode the category of *Frauenmystik*, Strauch points to articles on Mechthild which note her speculative thinking, and articles on Heinrich Seuse, for example, which note the emotional heights of his lyrical prose. Gabriele L. Strauch, “Mechthild of Magdeburg and the Category of *Frauenmystik*,” in *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1991), 171–86. Strauch maintains that we nevertheless need to hold onto the category of *Frauenmystik*, as does Helena Stadler in a more recent study. Helena Stadler, *Konfrontation und Nachfolge: Die metaphorische und narrative Ausgestaltung der unio mystica im Fließenden Licht der Gottheit von Mechthild von Magdeburg* (Bern: Lang, 2001). My argument here questions the usefulness of this strategy.

67. Albert Wimmer, ed., *Anthology of Medieval German Literature* (Bristol, Ind.: Wyndham Hall Press, 1987).

68. Albert Wimmer, ed., *Anthology of Medieval German Literature*, 2nd revised ed. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Vande Vere Publishing, 1991), 8 and 429.

69. Wimmer claims erroneously that the text produced by Heinrich of Nördlingen for Margaret Ebner was a translation back into German from the Latin translations of the Low German original. However, Heinrich writes specifically that he and his friends translated the book from a “difficult German.” Further, Wimmer states that the Latin versions were made after Mechthild’s death (433), when most scholars agree that since the Latin versions consist of material taken from only the first six books of Mechthild’s work, it must have been commissioned and begun *before* her death, probably at the time she went into the convent at Helfta (ca. 1270) where she wrote the seventh book.

70. Wimmer, *Anthology of Medieval German Literature*, 2nd revised ed., 429.

71. Wimmer, *Anthology of Medieval German Literature*, 2nd revised ed., 437.

72. Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 121.

73. Biddy Martin, “Zwischenbilanz der feministischen Debatten,” in *Germanistik in den USA*, ed. Frank Trommler (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989), 166.

74. Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), x.

75. Ibid.

76. For example, Katharina M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), xx, and more recently, G. Strauch, “Mechthild von Magdeburg,” 175: “It is not simply because Mechthild was a woman that her writings can be understood to have some gender specificity, but because she necessarily wrote from within the terms that were available to a person in her social, economic, religious, and sexual position.”

77. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 196; Toril Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 129–37.

78. Brother A, as the scribe is known, was keenly aware of the inaccuracy of his redactions of the *Memorial*, and he records Angela’s reactions to what he had written and read back to her. In one instance, Brother A quotes her as saying: “All the things which are written here are true and there is nothing whatsoever which is said falsely; but what was said was much more complete or had much more meaning. What I said is defective, and the scribe’s version of it is also defective.” Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance, O.F.M. (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 154.

79. Amy Hollywood’s reading of thirteenth-century mystics (chiefly Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch, and Marguerite Porete) in conjunction with Irigaray’s comments on mysticism argues for the medieval mystics’ achievement of an even more radical revision of the symbolic imaginary than Irigaray suggests. See Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 193–210.

80. In fact, I owe my own interest in Mechthild of Magdeburg to another such anthology edited by Elizabeth Petroff. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

81. Wilson's choices range from the thirteenth-century author, Dhuoda, who wrote a manual in Latin for her son, to the fifteenth-century English mystics and a French professional writer (Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Christine de Pizan); Thiébaux begins where Dronke did, with Perpetua in the third century and ends beyond Julian and Margery with Margery Brews Paston (d. 1495), daughter of an affluent landowner and author of six letters, though not the writer of them (she could read, but she could not write except to sign her name). Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1987/1994).

82. Thiébaux, *The Writings*, 11. In addition to the poetry, hagiographic writings, and mystical visionary literature selected by Dronke and Wilson, Thiébaux includes letters, histories, and travel accounts.

83. Other anthologies adopting a similar bias toward Mechthild's "emotional" mysticism are Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe* (St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 1989) (first published 1988 in French) (four of the seven chapters excerpted are from Book I); Carolyn Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1995) (four of six excerpts are from Books I or II); and Monica Furlong, *Visions & Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996) (six of the nine chapters excerpted are from Book I).

84. I make this argument in more detail elsewhere. Sara Suzanne Poor, "Medieval Incarnation(s) of Self: Subjectivity and Authority in the Writings of Mechthild von Magdeburg" (Dissertation, Duke University, 1994). See also Gisela Vollmann-Profe, "'Mechthild — auch in Werktagsskizzen': Zu berühmten und weniger berühmten Abschnitten des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*?" *ZfdPh* 113, Special Issue (1994): 144–58.

85. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers*, 163–82.

86. *Ibid.*, xix–xxi. See also Katharina M. Wilson and Glenda McLeod, "Sounding Trumpets, Chords of Light, and Little Knives: Medieval Women Writers," in *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. Linda E. Mitchell (New York: Garland, 1999), 331–44. Wilson and McLeod are careful not to make generalizations about medieval women writers and their texts that might be considered essentializing. However, the variety of genres, languages, and cultures in which the included writers wrote not only serves to resist essentializing impulses but also makes one wonder about the continued validity or usefulness of "women" as an organizing category.

87. Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, 2. Band: *Frauenmystik und Franziskanische Mystik der Frühzeit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1993)

88. Although her target was Caroline Walker Bynum's work, her critique applies here as well. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, Introduction.

89. Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1992–). One more volume (on the Dominicans) is forthcoming.

90. Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*.

91. I am grateful to Marianne Kalinke for sharing with me the syllabus for this seminar, as well as for inviting me to participate during the session on Mechthild of Magdeburg.

92. Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 3.

93. Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), 209–10.

94. This shift from religious to vernacular orthodoxy is of course also bound up in the changing approaches to theology and religion following the Reformation. The debate between Preger and Denifle is just the tip of the iceberg here. The institutionalization of the German universities in the new German Reich, confessional conflicts, and the rise of German nationalism all play a role.

Appendices

1. Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, 2 vols., ed. Hans Neumann, prepared for print by Gisela Vollmann-Profe (Munich: Artemis, 1990/1993), vol. 1, xiv–xix.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 242–45, for more details

3. András Vizkelety and Gisela Kornrumpf, "Budapester Fragmente des *Fließenden Lichts*" *ZfdA* 97 (1969): 279–80.

4. Paul-Gerhard Völker, "Neues zur Überlieferung des *Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit*" *ZfdA* 96 (1967): 29–30; Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, vol. 2, 233–35.

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